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DEVOTIONAL COMMENTS.

DEVOTIONAL COMMENTS :

Being a Series of

SCRIPTURAL EXPOSITIONS,

WITH A

PRAYER ANNEXED TO EACH SUBJECT;

DESIGNED AS AN

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OR, FOR

FAMILY WORSHIP.

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DEVOTIONAL COMMENTS.

NEW TESTAMENT CHARACTERS.

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS.

Matt. i. 18. Luke ii. 1. Matt. ii. 1—23.

WE once again pass through the contents of the Gospels, in order to gather out the different persons who are mentioned as having any thing of importance attached to their characters. We shall continue this method through the rest of the New Testament books ; seeking by this means to become acquainted with the several persons and transactions belonging to the interesting period of Christ's dwelling here on earth, and of the time of the infant church.

We are first introduced to Mary the Mother of Jesus. St. Matthew opens his gospel with a genealogical record, tracing the descent of Joseph, Mary's husband, from Abraham, and through the line of David. St. Luke also gives us Joseph's record, Luke iii. But *both Mary and Joseph* were thus descended from the same stock, for our Lord's count

they *both* went up to be taxed, under circumstances in which, had it been possible, Mary no doubt would have pleaded an exemption. This occurrence is a sufficient testimony respecting her genealogy; for, as a female, the taxing did not affect her, unless as she must have been the representative of her house, through failure in the male line; and had she not been obliged to appear on her *own* behalf, her husband's journey would have sufficed. It seems, therefore, that Mary and Joseph were relatively allied by blood, being each descended from David; and that Mary was the representative of her house, and taxed along with Joseph. So carefully did the Holy Ghost provide for the fulfilment of prophecy and promise; rendering it also unquestionable by this public civil transaction.

It is well known, that amongst the Jews the customs prevailed of *betrothing* persons together before they were married; in which case, the bond was esteemed equally sacred; or should it be violated by falsehood, the laws instituted in the cases between husband and wife were in force. Mary was betrothed to Joseph at the time we are first introduced to her; and, previously to the fulfilment of the marriage-contract, the angel appeared to her, as recorded, Luke i. 26, 27. He was commissioned to salute her as the appointed mother of Messiah, and to communicate to her the privilege to which she was exalted by this divine grace. On entering into her presence, the angel hailed her as highly favoured—as having the Lord with her—and as blessed among women: but Mary not understanding the purport of this salutation, was greatly perplexed, and betrayed much distress and solicitude of mind. To remove this anxiety, the angel proceeded to comfort her, by renewed assurances, that she had found favour from God, and that she should be the mother

of that Redeemer, towards whom faith and hope had so long been directed. She is then informed that she should conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost; bring forth a child, whom she should call Jesus; that he would be the Son of the Highest, the inheritor of David's throne, a king reigning over Jacob for ever, and possessing a dominion and kingdom that should have no end. And that the Holy Thing which should thus be born of her should be called the Son of God. She is then made acquainted, by the angel, of the divine purpose respecting Elizabeth the mother of John Baptist; and with a heart and mind now brought back to wonted composure, she expressed her entire acquiescence in the Lord's will respecting her. Being now left alone, she had opportunity for reflection, and resolved upon visiting her cousin Elizabeth, who resided in the hill country, in a city of Judah; here she remained three months, and then returned to her own house. It was upon her return home that Joseph's anxiety respecting her arose, as recorded in Matt. i. 19, 20; and that, after some hesitation, and a revelation from the Lord to assure him of Mary's innocence, he received her under his protection, with full satisfaction in the dispensation. In this situation she continued, until, as Luke ii. the requirement issued by order of the Roman government brought her to Bethlehem to be taxed. Here Jesus was born, in circumstances of poverty, inconvenience, and exposure; the concourse of people assembled in Bethlehem obliging Mary to seek accommodation in a stable, as there was no lodging room for her in the inn. The Holy Spirit had testified that Messiah should have his birth-place in this city, Micah v. 2. This was now fulfilled; and the shepherds being sent by the angels to see him, was thus come to be the favour of men, found a young child, with Mary his mother and Joseph.

And they published abroad the wonderful vision which had appeared to them, and the angelic testimony to him who was lying in the manger. These things sunk deep into the heart of Mary, where she treasured them up, *pondering* them with serious reflection and faith. According to the ceremonial law, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day, and was named, according to the angel's direction, *JESUS*. And at the appointed season Mary proceeded to the temple, to offer her gifts, according to the law, and to present this her first-born Son as a consecrated one to the Lord. Her offering proclaims that her temporal condition was one of poverty. On this occasion, she was cheered by the witness of Simcon and Anna, two saints of the Lord, who prophetically uttered the praises of Jehovah, for having, in this infant child, fulfilled the promise to Abraham. But she is forewarned of tribulation, and bid to prepare for a sword that should pierce through her own heart. Having performed all that was appointed in the law, Joseph and Mary, with the infant Jesus, returned from Jerusalem, to *Bethlehem first*, although St. Luke mentions Nazareth, *passing over* the intervening events recorded in Matt. ii. and taking up the history from the period of the settled residence of this little family in their own city. It is, however, important and interesting to us, to fill up in the history this little space of time when returning from the temple to Bethlehem, where probably they imagined they must in future live, according to the prophecy respecting Christ's birth. They hired a house, and it is generally supposed dwelt in it a year and a half; when the wise men from the east, being directed by the rulers and Herod from Jerusalem, came, and worshipped, and offered their gifts, entering, it is said, the *house*, and finding Mary with the babe. From this abode they quickly ob-
 flee from the perse-

cuting rage of Herod, and, according to the instruction of Jehovah, sought refuge in Egypt; from whence they returned on the death of Herod, and; instead of seeking Bethlehem, turned into their own former place of residence, the city of Nazareth, where they afterwards continued to reside. When our Lord had attained to the age of twelve years, Mary and Joseph took him with them to Jerusalem to the feast of the passover, which ordinance they regularly observed. It was at this time that Jesus remained behind in the temple; and that Mary, discovering, on her way back to Nazareth, that he was not in the company, returned with much anxiety to seek him, and rebuked him before the doctors, in terms which drew from our Lord a timely remonstrance against her forgetfulness of his glorious person and office. We have no more related of Mary, until the time when Jesus entered upon his public ministry; when, at the marriage in Cana, she interfered with his office, and was again reprov'd. John ii. 1. We next read of her, in Matt. xii. 46; Mark iii. 20, 21. accompanied by other relatives of Christ, desiring to speak with him, and wishing to restrain him from the laborious course he was pursuing. She is mentioned again, John xix. 25. in those most afflictive circumstances which accomplished Simeon's words, for she stood at the foot of the cross. From this period she dwelt with St. John, who cherished her according to his Master's dying injunction; but it is not known in what particular place they resided. She probably lived to a great age. We read of her, after our Lord's ascension, assembling with the rest of the disciples for prayer and communion with the saints, see Acts i. 14. but we have no further scriptural history of her, or of her last moments. ~~that~~ she died as a martyr; but we have no positive authority ~~that~~ she died as a martyr; but we have no positive authority

recorded in the sacred page amongst such as were thus persecuted.

The character of Mary is highly interesting, exhibiting a rich display of gracious excellencies, combined, as must always be the case in the vessels of earth however distinguished, with a mixture of infirmity and weakness. She appears to have lived in habits of retirement; her condition being also one of poverty, would tend to preserve her from the temptations which usually accompany riches and splendour: yet she was of royal descent, and had a dignified mind and spirit that ennobled her poverty. We may trace in her history the marks of those ornaments of the Spirit, which are of more value than the most costly gems; for she was modest, full of unaffected simplicity, and of a lowly spirit. A heavenly grace resided in her as a chosen vessel of mercy, for the Spirit of holiness and life loved her; and by the unquestionable witness of the scriptures themselves we are assured that she was one in whom Jehovah had determined to be glorified. She was blessed, or distinguished, among women, not only by the high honour of being the chosen mother of the Incarnate Saviour, but as one whose spirit was brought into fellowship with God by *favour* or covenant love. Of this we have sure evidences in the fruits which adorned her as a believer. We cannot wonder that the appearance of the angel, and his salutation, should trouble or perplex her; such visions must necessarily have had a solemn influence upon creatures as yet confined within a mortal tabernacle; nor is it to be a matter of surprise that she was perplexed at the salutation, not expecting what it was to introduce, not surmising that *she* was an object of such peculiar notice from heaven; but her emotions were not those of terror or dread, such as arise from guilt; her peace and conscious

integrity were still with her as a child of God ; and in the recovered serenity of a soul accustomed to hold converse with the invisible world, she calmly interrogated and communed with the angel. There is a great excellency of faith and love in the immediate accordancy of her will, and the flowing forth of her desire that the purpose respecting her should come to pass. If we consider her particular circumstances, we shall discover a great triumph over natural affections and reasonings ; for such an event as was now predicted must necessarily expose her to suspicion from Joseph, inflicting a wound upon his heart, and rending asunder the ties of affection by which they were bound together. She must also be exposed to shame and infamy, and punishment by death, were Joseph to turn from her and give her up to the law ; and many miseries, from which nature shrinks, were possibly involved in this divine decree respecting her. Taking these things into consideration, we may better understand the excellency of the supernatural grace which enabled her so immediately to quiet all these thoughts—to commit her affections, her character, her life, to the keeping of the Lord, and to say, “ Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it unto me according to thy word.” It was most suitable with her situation and feelings, that she should seek some retreat, where, being for a season relieved from all needful avocations belonging to home, she might have more leisure for meditation and prayer. Instead of communicating the secret to her friends, or revealing it even to Joseph, she determined to leave her cause with simplicity to the management of him in whom she believed ; but having received the information which told her of her cousin Elizabeth, as visited by a miraculous dispensation from God, she esteemed her house and society to be the most desirable at this juncture, wherein she demonstrated

modesty, simple trust in God, self-government, and love of spiritual communion. In this heavenly frame of mind she prosecuted her journey, and, being saluted by Elizabeth with an inspired voice, confirming the blessed witness of the angel, Mary rejoiced, and, under the power of the Spirit's inspiration, burst forth into a song of praise. In this song, the experience and affections of her soul are opened out to our view. While proclaiming those truths which belonged to the fulfilment of the promise in Christ, she also uttered the expression of her own appropriating faith in the blessings of salvation, to be established in him whom she was to bring forth. Her soul magnified the Lord ; his glory and greatness were now before her eyes in a splendour which filled her with adoring admiration and praise. Her spirit rejoiced in God *her Saviour* ! She considered the matchless condescension which had looked on her low estate ; she accepted the purpose as one that would exalt her in true dignity and blessedness ; she confessed that he who is mighty had done for her great things ; and she extolled him for this his grace to her, as an unworthy, poor, and destitute one ! She admired the wonderful method of grace, which had passed by the rich, the great, and mighty, and had chosen so lowly a dwelling, whereby to accomplish his purposes. She believed that herein he would perform all his mercy, think upon and exalt Israel, and fulfil his promise to Abraham ! And in all this she acknowledged and adored the *strength of his arm* ! In this song she celebrated the praises of Jehovah, as the God of might, of holiness, of mercy, of faithfulness, of sovereignty ; and shews us a mind and soul imbued with the knowledge of the Holy One, and practically and fervently devoted to his name. She seems to have returned home in that *firmness of faith* which was prepared to encounter the trials that awaited her ; trials

which, according to her anticipation, she met. See Matt. i. 19, 20. No doubt she was supported by the same Spirit who had upheld and blest her in the past season; and with the same equality of principle was ready for those after exposures and griefs, which belonged to her condition in Bethlehem and in Egypt. She seems, from the history, to have exercised, in all these situations, a holy thankful, and dependent frame of mind: and, instead of any elation of soul, from the distinctions which had been shewn her, she stood ready to endure hardship, to meet persecution, and to manifest her entire dependance upon the supply of the Spirit, and the requirements of God's instituted ordinances. In this disposition she attended the temple, complied with the sacred institutions, observed the passover, and thus sought, as a helpless sinner, to derive her consolations from a covenant God, and from that great propitiation which was typically set forth in the paschal lamb. Those consolations were never needed to a greater extent than by this eminent believer: for never were sorrows more pungent, or grief more extreme. Possessed as she was of the tenderness of maternal feeling; distinguished as she was by having one on whom to exercise this feeling, where perfection dwelt, and from whom she could never have cause of anxiety, or subjects for misgivings and fear, it must be very certain, that the exposure of her beloved infant, the perils which compassed the way of him whom she thus tenderly loved, the fatigues and exhaustion of body to which he was constantly exposed, in labours, watching, and whole nights passed in the mountains in solitude, and, as she well knew, sometimes also in sacred sorrow; the insults, scorn, and ill treatment constantly expressed against him by the infatuated rulers, whose power and authority, a mother's weakness might have feared, these were all situations of

deep trial to Mary. And what shall we say when the last dreadful scene commenced, when her eyes had to witness the bloody, exhausted, pale, and suffering form ascending up the mount; when malignant murderers were beheld perpetrating their last deeds of cruelty, and he, whom she had fondly cherished in a mother's breast, must now bleed and die, without the power on her part to administer one comfort either to his body or mind! Who can enter into the depths of that deep sorrow which now would desolate her inmost soul? None but he who hung upon the tree! and who, seeing the anguish that was swelling there, spoke to her, in words of dignified sweetness and mercy, calculated to awaken her recollection of *who* he was, and to shew her also his tender thought for her! Great was the need for divine support which belonged to these times of trial; and Mary must have received the abundant measure; otherwise she could not have passed through these scenes, as she evidently did, with so much faith, love, sympathy, and submission of her heart to the divine purpose.

Let us not, however, suppose that Mary was free from the existence of those conflicts which belong to the warfare that is felt in all regenerate persons between the flesh and spirit; and let us not overlook the demonstrations which she gave of having need to be watchful and penitent. There was a blameable negligence of such a sacred trust, when she could travel a days' journey, and not know that her child was absent from the company; and there was a worse error, when having found him, and that too in a situation which might have roused her recollection of his appointed office, she impatiently rebuked him as having committed a great offence against her; using also an improper mode of speech, as if Jesus were really the son of Joseph, and had no higher parentage. Therefore the nature of the rebuke

she received, directing her to remember his nature, and wherefore he had come forth, even to do *his Father's* will. She also offended at Cana by thinking to exercise parental authority over him as Messiah, and to dictate his works; for which she was reproved in a similar way with the preceding occasion, *Woman*, what have I to do with thee. She had intruded beyond her prescribed authority as the mother of Jesus. Again she was hurried by false feeling, when she sought to restrain him in his work, and seemed at the moment to have lost sight of his peculiar and glorious mission. These were dark shades in Mary's character, sufficient to prove that she was a sinner, and of like passions with others in nature, and that she owed her excellency of grace to the work of the Spirit, like other regenerate persons, and her final acceptance to the finished redemption of him in whom her spirit rejoiced as God *her Saviour*. Yet even in the midst of these infirmities, we behold the superior energy of the gracious life rising above the temptation; for she received the reproof with conviction and meekness—she was ready to desist from her wishes, when it was shown her that she erred. When apparently *refused* her request at Cana, she was not offended, neither discouraged, but being fully acquainted with the kindness and heart of Jesus, she believed that still, having rectified her error, he might do the miracle, and accordingly directed the servants to observe what he might say. And lovely indeed is that display of humility and heavenly mindedness which was manifested by her, when having lost her earthly comfort, and ended her painful anxieties respecting Jesus, by the last closing scene of his sufferings; she returned again to her retirement to spend the remnant of her pilgrimage where she had begun it, in unobtrusive piety, in love of, and communion with the saints; and thus seeking

consolation for her wounded heart where alone it could be found, in waiting faith, and joy in Him who was now beyond the reach of sorrow, ascended up on high, and glorified as the everlasting Mediator. Now indeed might Mary take up her prophetic harp again, "Magnify the Lord"—tell of what mighty deeds God her Saviour had displayed—and of the wonders yet to come, when the promise made to Abraham, and the help required by Israel, shall be manifested by triumphs introducing his lasting kingdom according to the promise, Luke i. 32, 33.

Let us then, in conclusion of our view of Mary's character, love to contemplate her excellencies, but carefully give the whole glory to God, as magnifying the riches of his grace in a sinner made a saint by the Spirit's new creation; remembering the awful delusion which has infatuated so many millions respecting the nature of the Virgin Mary, exalting her above her station, and beyond her condition, contrary to this express scripture account which exhibits her by her own confession saved as a sinner by salvation in the Lord and by Christ's address to her evidently kept in that subordination belonging to her in this relation. And let us consider that the Lord has been very merciful to us, in causing these records to be given as a preventive to the superstition that man is disposed to, and in giving us so little of the particulars either of her life or death. Let us not act perversely, or ignorantly, but follow the Spirit's leadings, and admit of nothing into our faith or practice unauthorised by the written word.

From this interesting character, believers may obtain much improvement, since it addresses us in many of those particulars which belong to christian experience; and in an especial manner, we may gather confirmations of the faith which

we have respecting the methods of grace. In Mary we have seen how they are magnified, by shewing forth strength in weakness, riches in poverty, and peace in trouble; all free gifts from a covenant of love, and all intended to shew that the Lord deals in gracious sovereignty through all his government. What is the lowest condition of this world, if the Lord is pleased to choose it as a dwelling for himself? Surely it ceases to be low in the true sense of the word, and becomes the most elevated, since the divine presence gives glory and dignity wherever it is displayed. This we may say of our lot, if it be such as Mary proved, and be honoured with visitations from the Spirit. These visitations will assuredly be given to the redeemed, for the Lord delights in visiting more than we in receiving, and is ever ready to impart manifestations of favour to his blood-bought people. We have a heavenly messenger, even the Holy Ghost the comforter, whose presence will prove our dearest portion, for he will testify of Jesus, and hail us as highly-favoured and distinguished amongst sinners. With such an inheritance, we are richer and greater than any human distinctions could make us; and should increasingly appreciate such unmerited mercies. Yet mercies of this description will sometimes occasion passing solicitude, and are also preparations for present trial in the world; and in this respect we may compare our experience with that of Mary. Under partial discoveries of the divine will, it will not unfrequently happen, that a holy anxiety is awakened within us; or even under powerful influences, which kindle joyous frames of feeling and give us a sense of the divine presence, we may experience correspondent *care*. We are anxious to know *what* the Lord designs,—what is the *full* extent of the divine will? or whether the feelings within ~~us~~ really from the Spirit of

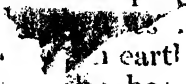
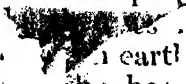
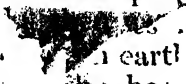
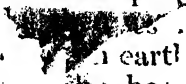
holiness, and no delusive imagination? This may cause us to “cast in our mind,” as Mary did, what manner of salutation it may be under which we are influenced. Dispositions such as these, are highly acceptable, and are observed by our Lord, who will not leave us in uncertainty. He will follow up his revelation with increasing clearness, and will hush our fears, and satisfy our inquiries by further communications. We should, however, meet this ready grace of the Spirit, by offering our appeal in simplicity and faith, and endeavour to bring our minds into a state of serenity and expectation, such as may be preparatory to the reception of knowledge. This is particularly necessary when we are about to receive an appointment of trial; and we should vigilantly watch against imagining that the revelations, which distinguish us *spiritually*, can be received with no other design on God’s part than to give us *ease*. This is not the divine method with saints; and in proportion to the elevation we have in Christ, will be the *trial* of the principles we have received. It is by living in this exercise of faith, that we are prepared to say with Mary, whatever be the nature of God’s will concerning us, “Behold the hand-maid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.” Grateful acquiescence in the heavenly revelation, and a holy desire to glorify God *in the way* which he has ordained, will be a precious part of the distinction belonging to us as his people; and we shall thus, internally and externally, verify and exhibit the filial satisfaction a reconciled soul has in all the appointments of our heavenly Father. This is one of the most important parts of a christian profession; we *feel its importance* in respect of our own peace, we *see it in the evident effects* which are produced *upon others* through the conduct of believers in *their trials*. Will not these considerations quicken *us in* ~~us in~~ *being an abstraction*

from the world, and a fellowship with Jesus, by which our spirit may be kept under the unction of divine preparation? O surely, if we estimate sacred delights, such will be our resolve. It will be serviceable to follow Mary's example, and get up into the *hill* country where saints reside, and especially where we may find those whose experience accords with our own; here we are in the region most favourable to the strengthening of holy affections, and may possess in such meditation and communion, new and blissful manifestations from our Lord. He is never backward in the interviews we seek with him. We bend our steps to the heights of those scenes where our Lord exhibited his glory: the Mount of Calvary, of Olivet, of Tabor, of Zion, are the sacred places where the soul seeks to rest; and here the covenant Jehovah unfolds his loving-kindness, reveals his loving heart. These are occasions wherein the rich enjoyment of the hidden life is proved; and many a time the believer, even with shame, and grief, and danger before his eyes, can exclaim, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." The heart has lost none of its tenderness, sensibility, relative affections, or feelings of nature, but these are brought into subjection, they are placed at the disposal of the Lord, and superior pleasures now occupy and cheer the soul. It is in this way that the Lord so wonderfully prepares his people for the various circumstances of trial awaiting them: so that, like the eminent example before us, they are strengthened to have fellowship with him in a course of shame, persecution, the anguish of the human affections, and the sacrifice of life itself.

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affections will be kept in subordination and discipline; nor is there in this wide world any man who can compare with the *real* christian, acting up to his principles in any of those duties, or events, which belong to this temporal scene. We must acknowledge that Mary was tried in a very extensive and painful form; and we see how she was upheld. We shall have our proportion of trial if we have our lot with the heirs of a better world, and we shall be equally upheld by the divine faithfulness. Let us therefore strive to rise above the solicitude which sometimes perhaps rushes into our heart, not fearing what we may have to endure, from the suspicion of friends, shame in the world, persecution, poverty, or hardship, or the heart-rending sight of seeing those whom we love rejected, vilified, and slain. These are bitter ingredients in the cup of mortal life, yet we have the everlasting promises with us, and no trial shall ever exceed the proportion of strength which the Saviour will impart. We should therefore go forth to these scenes, as they who are descending from the hill-country, with stedfastness, composure, and holy serenity; and, at the same time, keep a guard upon our hearts, lest we should at any time be surprised into an act, or expression, inconsistent with this heavenly existence. We may be endangered like Mary, from the strugglings of nature within us; particularly when any one specially endeared to us is exposed, or will voluntarily go into fatigue, peril, and sorrow. A parent's heart, a mother's especially, may be strongly assailed in such moments, and the cry of the inward and outward man is ready to be "spare thyself." They who know what strong natural affection is, are the possessors of that love which entwines the heart with that of the child, can best bear the struggle, and when the struggle may be, when the abstracted

out for suffering, and how by the impulse of emotion, the lip and hand may be ready to put an arrest upon the step. Here let us be guarded, and at such times resolutely pray, that we may never interfere in the high calling of one who is appointed to any service by the Saviour, nor dare to dictate, remonstrate, or restrain, when a heavenly Father has shewn what is his will. It is confessed that such circumstances are trying, but they do not exceed the promise; and as Mary was strengthened to overcome her natural feelings, and was ready to let them feel the gentle rein which the Lord put upon them, so we may believe that grace will triumph in and for us, helping us to leave our all with him. If we meditate upon the several situations in which Mary has appeared before us, and then compare the christian calling in every age with hers, and next consider the possibility of our being appointed to tread in steps of affliction, not unlike some with which she was familiar, we shall readily admit, that supernatural sufficiency for these things is absolutely necessary; and this may quicken us to a sense of the nature of heavenly principles, and to fervency in asking for them. Let us make this use of the subject we have considered, and in pursuing our pilgrimage as followers of Jesus learn to live upon the promise, dismiss unreasonable unbelieving fears, do not anticipate burdens, for "sufficient to the day is the evil thereof," yet stand in meek readiness for any rising storm which may blow from the desert, since in the whole of this life we are liable to vicissitude, and are the objects against whom combined adversaries will plot destruction.

May the eternal Spirit be our anointing consecrating I.  triumph in our God. We have et.  his followers; let us adhere to o  death, and many times in spirit se  r. and at the foot of the

cross, gaze on our soul's beloved in agonies and death, mourn as one that mourneth for his only son ; and, whilst penitence and love thus mingle sacred streams and weep for Jesus slain, let faith do a further office, and realize the tender loving care of him who died ; whose voice will cheer us and whose providence will care for us even unto the end. Thus we shall savingly and peacefully know Jesus, our crucified Lord, our risen and faithful Saviour.

PRAYER.

MOST gracious, most merciful Lord, in infinite compassion behold us Thy people who unfeignedly desire fellowship with Thee, and visit us with such manifestations of Thy presence as may satisfy and assure our souls. We long after Thee as our own Lord and Redeemer, and would receive from Thee that blessed witness of the Holy Ghost, by whom we may magnify and rejoice in Thee. Vouchsafe to bestow the privilege upon us, for we are utterly necessitous, and are cast upon Thee dependently for all that we hope or require. We bless Thee that Thou hast been pleased to elevate our thoughts, teaching us that there are no enjoyments in this world to be coveted comparably with Thy smiles and favour ; and that a lowly humble lot, in the present pilgrimage, is preferable with us to all that human greatness could bestow. Better is it to be a door keeper in the house of our God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness ; better to have a dinner of herbs with Thy love than all the dainties of the rich without Thy blessing. * O make us to have this judgment along with fervent love to Thee. Make us to believe in this distinction as not only great but satisfying ; and may we wait for Thee in the midst of our appointed lot, and look

for Thee, Lord, as our present and beloved companion. Grant that we may delight in the hill country, where meditation, prayer, and communion with Saints may be enjoyed; and lead us by Thy Spirit into those high regions which are above the world. Yet let us not be unprepared for the duties and responsibilities which meet us in this life. Make our higher privileges to be means of fitting us for our subordinate obligations; and when we descend from the precious seasons of fellowship with Thee in abstraction and prayer, may we bear the visible demonstration, that we have been with Jesus; and exhibit a holy serenity, peace, and purity, a high existence by which faith realizes the eternal will in all things, and a readiness to pass through tribulations of every description for Thy name's sake. O Lord, keep us in these exercises—fix our eyes upon Thee as our Lord, and pattern, and life; may we stand at the foot of the cross from day to day, and behold Thee with appropriating love. O Lord Jesus, thus remember us, and visit us as Thou dost Thy redeemed for the glory of Thy blessed name. Amen.

JOSEPH THE CARPENTER.

Matt. i. 16—25. xiii. 55. Mark vi. 3.

THE Scripture history of Joseph is short, but what little is related of his character is interesting and important. He was a descendant of the royal house of David, but in circumstances of great reduction, being by occupation a carpenter; he also resided in Nazareth a despised city; and had nothing of temporal possession, or station, to distinguish him amongst men. Yet he was chosen by Jehovah to be the appointed protector of Mary and the Infant Jesus. We have already seen, in the history of Mary, that he was her espoused husband at the period of the incarnation, and that he continued to be associated with her in many of those anxious and perilous scenes to which she was exposed, in each of them maintaining a character of prudence, justice, and affection. We have no scriptural account of his death; but he is supposed to have departed from this life previously to our Lord's entrance upon his public ministry. We read no more of him after the occasion in which Mary rebuked Jesus in the Temple, and was corrected for mistaken spirit and speech.

This character affords us many instructive lessons, and presents us with an interesting subject of investigation. It is evident that his soul was imbued with a holy contentment in the lot assigned him by divine Providence; he seems to have lived above any temptation to dissatisfaction, or any thought of aspiring after earthly distinctions. His lineage, and the natural pride of a Jew upon the subject of David's house and heritage,

might have found dangerous excitements to ambition, or to discontent; but the history leaves us with the impression that Joseph looked beyond these dignities, so that he did not covet what a throne or dominion might have given; and it is very manifest that this disposition was attended with high spiritual possessions, so that we may believe his contentment to have been of a *gracious* character, the fruit of the Holy Ghost. The Lord himself gives him the peculiar appellation of a *just man*; which, as a scripture term, and particularly as it stands in the present history, describes a state far exceeding what men generally suppose *justice* to signify; and if we observe the connection in which the expression is used respecting Joseph, we shall perceive how much of Christian peculiarity is included in the phrase. Judging by *human* maxims we might have expected to read, 'Joseph being a just man was minded to *put* her away;' this would have been according to the *severer* rule of judgment, and would have been an act of justice, so far as the infliction of a righteous sentence against the supposed criminal. But it is declared that his *justice* interposed in her behalf, and that on this account he was *not* minded to put her away publicly. This is explained by the experience of a believer's heart. It was a justice arising out of self-knowledge, reflection, and humility. He looked upon Mary as a transgressor, and he had reason to apprehend that she had violated her faithfulness to him; but he allowed not the angry passions or resentments of nature to hurry him into desperate and severe measures; he weighed the supposed offence in a just balance, considering himself as a fellow-sinner, as equally liable to temptation, as a debtor to God's forgiving mercy, and as therefore bound to show mercy. There was no haste or disdain of Mary, but in the midst of his own trouble of mind he had a humble and tender heart, anxiously

bent upon shielding her from shame and suffering, and upon divorcing her from him by some private expedient. These thoughts seem to have occupied and afflicted him ; difficulties were in his way ; and he was engaged in this anxious train of reflection, when he dropt asleep upon his bed. These anxieties were however mercifully relieved by him who reads the secrets of the heart ; and in a dream, the angel of the Lord was commissioned to address the sleeping saint, and to reveal to him the gracious purpose which had selected Mary as the mother of the blessed Saviour ; directing him also as to his line of conduct respecting her. To this divine revelation Joseph yielded a prompt and cheerful obedience ; his fears and solicitude were now banished ; his bosom was restored to its wonted peace ; and he instantly prepared to fulfil the important trust which now devolved upon him. This trust he discharged with persevering tenderness. In all the after scenes of difficulty belonging to these interesting and sacred duties, it is evident that he exhibited an uninterrupted course of integrity, having an entire harmony of feeling with Mary, and a lowliness of mind which made him willing to yield her the more apparent and visible responsibility, whilst all which he could give of protection and comfort were affectionately hers and the holy child. Whatever scorn, reproach, or contempt were endured by him, consequent upon the Jews' hatred of Christ, he meekly endured ; and had no hesitation in encountering the hardships to which he was liable when driven into Egypt by the malice of persecution. In this limited outline of Joseph's history we have the view of a lovely character, one adorning the retired walks of life—one blest with simplicity, humility, tenderness, intrepidity—a *just* man ! And one in whom, as the Lord was glorified here, so will he be for ever, in the manifestation of this saint amongst

the company of the perfected spirits in the Zion above.

Let it be delightful to us thus to be led into those retreats where heavenly beauties abound, and thus to contemplate the wonderful grace of the Spirit, who falls in his covenant character like showers upon the favoured region where the divine purpose rests. In this life-giving Lord innumerable consecrated souls are made to appear plants or trees of righteousness; and in many a spot where perhaps we are disposed to believe all is barren, there will be found some lily of the valley, some lowly but precious soul, under the culture and blessing of the Lord. Providential circumstances will frequently bring to light these more retired works of the Spirit, and by this means will teach the believer to look with grateful expectation to the day when thousands of hidden ones will be made to stand forth, that Jesus the Lord may be glorified and admired in them. This should stimulate us to work and wait with simplicity, whether it be in seeking our own or others' salvation; and to be contented if we can realize the eye and presence of our Lord with us, whatever may be our station or circumstances in this world. We are accustomed to consider Mary and Joseph as individually honored to a peculiar extent; and in their several appointments, respecting our dear Redeemer, we view them as having a dignity which exceeds the splendours of this world. The same judgment should govern us towards our individual condition; for all their honours were *spiritual*, and if we have a sanctified mind, we shall learn to put the highest estimate upon what belongs to the kingdom of Jesus, and what is *above* the perishable greatness of time. When we contemplate these characters, let us endeavour to model our own after their example, in deadness to the objects which court the

heart's ambition after worldly things. In holy contentment with a low estate. In diligent discharge of the humblest occupations of life ; knowing that in these the Lord is frequently found as a present friend, and imparting enjoyments which the world can never give ; and that however the men of this world may scorn, or overlook, or condemn us, we are independent of what they contribute either of pleasure or pain, so long as Jesus is our all and we are in communion with him. It may be the Lord's will to *keep* us in a low estate, so that we live and die little known, and with scarcely a stone to tell where our mouldering body rests ; but the record of every saint is on high ; and when Jesus counteth up his people, it shall be written, that this or that man was born in her. Psalm lxxxvii. 5, 6. Zion's children shall have their register proclaimed as the travail of Jesus' soul, and as written in the Lamb's book of life, to be heirs of endless glory. However retired our lot may be, we have, in consequence of our high descent from the covenant and our glorious prospects in Christ, a holy consistency to maintain, before the Lord, and before the holy angels, that to them, we, as members of his redeemed body, may exhibit the power of his salvation. This will afford us a high and blessed motive for perseverance in the culture of every disposition which may adorn us as believers, although no eyes should behold us but those of the invisible world. But sometimes persons, nurtured in privacy, are growing up in the Lord, that they may fill some important public station in the church, or for the church, when the fulness of God's season respecting them is come ; and should this be our appointment, we may profitably remember, how salutary such preparatory retirement has been to others, and should be to us, that we may be in the habits of self-government, of industry, and of humility, and enter upon our

trust guarded against the danger of elation or despondency, which will belong to those who are inexperienced or ignorant. There are many natural evils which are inseparable from high responsibilities; and when our responsibility is peculiarly of a spiritual nature, or arising from our association with Christ, we may expect these evils to run proportionably high. Scorn, contempt, persecution, and exposure will attend us; and as these are experiences which call for great meekness and self-discipline, we should be thankful for whatever has put us upon the exercise of these graces, and given stability and maturity to our life of faith. The example of Joseph may be very directive to us as Christians; for although we have not the mother and the infant as he had, yet the Spirit has compared the church and her spiritual offspring thus. Rev. xii. 1—6. Herein we have an opportunity to display the same mind as that which animated this ancient protector of the blessed cause; and feeble as we are in ourselves, it is our privilege to put forth the strength of the Holy Ghost in us, in the use of every faculty and talent we have received to this great object. There are many occasions in which we may demonstrate that we love and would cherish Zion, and that the saints are precious and received as a trust in our hearts. And should the Lord make trial of our faith, whether we will for these interests embrace trial, shame, and persecution, happy indeed are we, if in the result it is found, that the outcast child of Zion is received to our bosom finding a shelter with us; or that the exposed church is taken under our defence, so far as it belongs to the measure of our privilege thus to protect the cause. Duties such as these may sometimes be preceded by many anxious thoughts, both as it respects the public confession of the faith, or any special act of faith. Sometimes there may be cowardly apprehensions,

or reasonings, as to the opinions of the world; and sometimes there may be passing doubts as to the just line of conduct we have to pursue. But if there is the integrity which belongs to a gracious work in the soul, we shall not long remain in a state of indecision; we shall resolve upon the association of our interests with those of Christ, and shall receive direction from him respecting the path we are to tread. We have indeed no visions, and no right to look for supernatural voices, or to rest on dreams of the night; but this is no *loss*, for we have “the more sure word of prophecy,” unto which if we give heed, the Lord will impart an accompanying directive energy, which will conduct us in the right way. And he, who is observant of our hearts, as he was of Joseph’s, and knows every subject of solicitude which is lodged in our breast, is as loving and true to us as he was to him. In his own best time and way, he will reveal to us what is needful, and his own invincible words of mercy will cheer our way, for still he is ready to say, “fear not.” With humble dependance upon the promise, let us then come forth to confess the sacred cause of Christ, cast in our lot with the persecuted and despised saints, open our heart, our hand, our house, for a refuge to the followers of the Lamb; and be bold to acknowledge the spiritual dignities which the world contemns, but which are the only substantial or satisfying portion.

In our progress through the Christian profession, we shall have the necessity of cultivating *that justice* which is ascribed to Joseph. Our fellow pilgrims will many times require this from our heart, or *seem* to require it. • Whenever we are placed in the circumstances of having to judge another, or to take any active step respecting a brother, we must carefully consult for the preservation of true principle. Christianity does not require that we act with blind partiality towards

those who are allied to us in the faith : we must see their faults, and condemn the error ; but true Christianity will require and effect in true disciples a peculiar mode of demonstrating this integrity. We are not to make the church or the offender, a *public example*, if it be possible to avoid it ; divine love must prevail to consult for the preservation of the cause from blasphemers, who would delight in discovering the secret offences of any called christian, or the infirmities of the true children. A believer must therefore act with great caution, reflection, and self-government, if he undertake to be a reprover, lest in his professed zeal to tear off the mask of hypocrisy, or to deal out a sentence of justice, he inflict such wounds upon the church as he can never heal. He must also be well aware that his own mind is not under some mistake, prejudice, or influence from appearances, which, were he acquainted with the whole truth, would appear highly criminal or erroneous ; otherwise he may be dealing out blows and stabs in the dark, by which, though unconsciously, he is making the body of Jesus to bleed. Or, be the cause in which he is engaged ever so palpably calling for reproof, if he be a Christian he must be a *just* man :—not charging a whole body with the sins of some of its members : not trespassing beyond the line of due desert : not unmindful of his *own* participation in the nature he rebukes : not negligent of the *spirit* by which he is moved ; but after the example of the holy man before us, humbly and seriously reflecting upon the most expedient way in which to remove the evil if it does exist, and to preserve the character of the blessed gospel. This is usually best effected by intrepidity, governed by meekness and humility. “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” And there is more real courage and zeal in the meek perseverance of this steady Christian justice, than in the most virulent

or daring expression against men. It costs us more to strive with meekness, than to vent our indignation ; therefore the believer should prefer the self-denying course, looking to the Lord alone for the efficacy of his efforts, and knowing how invincible is his “ still small voice.” In private, as in public situations, the same spirit should be cultivated. Towards all allied to us by the ties of nature or of grace, we owe *this justice*. And usually we shall find that a sinner’s heart is penetrated much sooner by *gentle* decision, than by violence. Experience will teach us this lesson : for he who knows himself will learn to deal mercifully with his brother.

PRAYER.

WE beseech Thee, O gracious and merciful God, to behold us in Thy tender compassion, and to give us the unspeakable blessedness of a powerful appropriation of Thy salvation. O blessed Lord, we look and long for Thee, and would find Thee as our faithful guide through this miserable and tumultuous world. Blessed are they who can rest in Thy love, and ask no other portion ; blessed are they who, in the scenes of retirement, in labour, in publicity, or in pain, are satisfied in a fellowship high and spiritual in Thy dear self. O give us this inheritance, and make us thine by a liberty of access, and a simplicity of faith, such as Thou hast given to Thy children in every age. We pray for the devotional frame of mind which is instrumental to so many purest joys ; O may our spirits rise to Thee day and night, and all our secret thoughts and anxieties and interests be naked and opened to Thee. Read them, O Lord, by Thy searching eye, and address Thy delivering counsels unto us by Thy illuminated word ; and whatever may be

our necessity, in mighty grace relieve us; and speak to us in the consolations of the everlasting Comforter. We desire to embrace Thy cause in the world, whether it be by a private or public expression of our faith. And if it please Thee to place us in responsible situations, giving us a charge respecting Thy church or saints, O let us have a supply of the Holy Ghost corresponding with our duty; make us to arise and do Thy blessed will; make us cheerfully to meet every difficulty which may meet us in the way; and bless us with a spirit full of steady, abiding faith, equal to the calling we have received. O may we have the mind of our dearest Lord in all which we undertake, combining meekness with determination, and charity with courage; give us to be *just* in the gospel sense of the term when applied to Thy people; and O, influence us, gracious God, in all our ways by a holy disposition conformed to Thy will. In this honour, remember us, O Lord, and evermore bless us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

HEROD THE GREAT.

Matt. ii. 1—18.

THE character next upon record, after Joseph the Carpenter, is Herod the King, called in profane history, Herod the Great. He is presented to us in the sacred page as great in *crime*, and as an awful example of cruelty and infatuation. It may give an increase of interest in the investigation of his conduct as recorded in Matthew, if we look to the history of this monster's career, as handed down to posterity by historians, especially to the picture drawn of his iniquitous course by Mr. Prideaux, in his *Connections of the Old and New Testaments*. 335

Herod was not a Hebrew by descent ; he was an Idumean proselyted to the Jewish Religion ; and so, by profession, a worshipper of Jehovah, and an observer of His institutions. His father was a man eminent in station ; but he was himself advanced gradually to the dignities he attained, owing much of his prosperity to the aid he received from the Roman power, especially from the favour shewn him by Augustus. It was by this means he first attained to be Governor of Galilee, and next King of Judea, with many other provinces attached to his dominions. His warlike abilities were great ; he was a man of ardent ambition, well-versed in the intrigues, and stratagems, and worldly policy by which to compass his own designs ; and his chief object through life was to use his natural talents for obtaining dominion and earthly greatness ; to which inordinate desire all other interests and passions were subservient. Herod was twenty-five years old when made Governor of Galilee : he

reigned in the whole forty-five years, dying at the age of seventy. His life was one constant scene of tumult and of atrocious wickedness. The political interests of his kingdom were indeed advanced under his government, but the tyranny of his conduct rendered him unbearable to his subjects, and abominable to his family. Having a naturally suspicious mind, he never wanted objects on whom to exercise his murderous passions; nor did he ever scruple to perpetrate the most horrible murders and acts of cruelty, in order to gratify his love of revenge, and his lust of power. By his command subjects were tortured, and relatives put to death; and in the fury of these jealous passions, he at different times murdered his wife, his two sons, his grandfather, uncle, and father-in-law. After which he suffered great pangs of conscience, and terrors of mind. Yet, unamended by these alarms, he afterwards executed the mother of his wife Mariamne, brought his son Antipater to a public death, and knowing that he was detested by his subjects, and surmising that on his own departure from the world there would be public rejoicings, he devised a plan whereby he imagined he should prevent this expression, and force the appearance of mourning. He engaged his sister and her husband to swear to him, that a multitude of Jews, whom he had brought together and shut up in the circus, should at the instant of his death be slain, so that at least all Judea should mourn. The knowledge of these facts will render the history of his conduct as given us in the gospel less surprising. We cease to wonder at the terror of his jealous mind, when he heard of one born to be King of the Jews. Had he acted rationally, he might have considered himself now an old man, little exposed to danger from an infant just born; but his own mad passions blinded and infatuated him, and with cruel rage he

proceeded, as he supposed, to secure his throne by the murder of the little ones in the coast of Bethlehem, fulfilling the affecting prophecy respecting the desolated mothers who should fill Judea with weeping. The crime preceded his own death but a few months. Of this event we have the most awful account from profane historians : he was seized by the most excruciating tortures of body and mind, rendering him a frightful spectacle to all who beheld him, yet without repentance, and still deep plunged in the abyss of his own inward hell, where nothing prevailed but diabolical blasphemous and tormenting passions. Thus died one of the most horrible monsters of the human race ; leaving an awful memorial of human folly and weakness, and of divine retribution and power.

Herod sought at times to ingratiate himself with the Jews, by some public acts of liberality towards them, particularly by his splendid attention to the temple, which he rebuilt and beautified at a vast expence ; but he was unpopular and unacceptable, his crimes rendering him odious to all men. He was greatly abhorred by the Pharisees, because he inculcated the duty of paying tribute to a foreign power, which they deemed inconsistent with Hebrew liberty : and he was also an object of distaste to the more conscientious amongst the pharisees, on account of his holding that occasional conformity to the customs of the heathen, was lawful and right. This he always did when his worldly projects could be thereby furthered ; and on account of this last-mentioned opinion, they who mixed such conformity with the worship of Jehovah, were called *Herodians* ; and this leaven the Lord rebuked, see Matt. xxii. 16. Mark iii. 6 : viii. 15 : xii. 13.

The particular features of depravity displayed in

this character are so prominent, that it is scarcely necessary to make any further observations upon what Herod was, as a monster of iniquity, than simply to record his deeds, by which he is sufficiently known. The world gave him the appellation of *Great*, on account of the talents for government, &c. which he possessed; and in this respect he seems to have merited the distinction, for he is by all acknowledged to have been a great statesman and warrior, and to have evinced great perseverance and activity in the several duties belonging to these responsible stations. His chief pre-eminence however was in vice, for his depraved nature was evinced by dispositions peculiarly diabolical. He was cruel, selfish, sensual, suspicious, hasty, and impetuous. A tyrant, a murderer, without natural affections, without compassion, and without remorse; excepting only where his own enjoyments were injured by his hasty and bloody decrees. He had no estimation of the happiness or the life of a fellow creature, and he united to these daring dispositions the sin of the deepest and meanest hypocrisy, attempting to mask his abominations, when a smoother exterior promised him more ready success in his ambitious or revengeful schemes. And as is not unfrequent in the character of tyrants, he was capable of being flattered and reduced by the cunning of others to be a tool in their hands. He gave continual evidence in the course of his life, that he was thus acted upon, being a slave to his own lusts. They who would manage him, had only to tamper and administer to these, and he was immediately their dupe. He was credulous and fickle, and gave demonstration that in many instances he forfeited the idea of *greatness*, and was in fact *little* and debased. In his conduct on the birth of our Lord, he was meanly hypocritical, and barbarously savage: and in this, with many other occasions,

opened the state of a heart which in the midst of every thing humanly great was ill at ease. It was not in the power of Herod's passions, edicts, or stratagems, to impart one smallest degree of real comfort to his mind ; he was perpetually tossed on the sea of wild disordered imaginations, fears, and terrors ; he had no assurance of his kingdom, no domestic peace, no confidence that any around him were really his friends. In constant alarm, lest he should die by murder, or be betrayed by his relatives, domestics, and people, he was tormented by the conviction that all men hated him. Yet, miserable as this world was rendered to him by his own depravity, he delighted still *in* his depravity, and still cleaved to this world even in old age, as if it were an idol from which it was worse than death to separate him. Thus passed his miserable days and nights, until in the final scene, the righteous judgments of the Almighty seized him as their prey, even here in the body delivering him up to the tormentor, blasting him visibly by the curse which his crimes had procured, and causing him to depart into the abyss of hell with the conspicuous marks of the irrevocable sentence upon him ; his sins answering to the Apostle's words, going *before-hand* to judgment.

In such awful examples we have much to affect the thoughtful mind. Many are the warnings and precepts which the Holy Spirit directs to sinners in every age, teaching us to beware of our own evil nature, and of the consequences of indulged passion. But perhaps no lesson is more awakening than that which meets us in records of this description. For, if we believe that all human nature is descended from one original parent, fallen and corrupt, and carrying in it the seeds of all sin and iniquity, we are prepared to look upon such a

man as Herod, without supposing that he was some monster not of human kind, or that his were crimes such as we could not perpetrate. It is very true, that the participation we all have, of the same *evil nature*, does not necessarily constitute us all of one *disposition*. The root and principle of all natural passions is evil, because we are fallen ; yet the productions arising from these, may differ in their particular qualities. This we constantly see in the great variety which exists in the characters of men. But if our dispositions are amongst the least violent, we owe this mercy to restraining grace ; and we should not forget that we are sufficiently *depraved* to be capable of any of the foulest deeds committed by man, were we left by the Spirit, and temptations were suitably addressed to our nature. Thus for the common and restraining mercies of the Holy Ghost, we ought to be thankful, giving the glory of any difference in natural *disposition* to him alone. The affinity of the spirit of man with the spirit of devils is conspicuous and alarming. It is daily and hourly evinced in all the innumerable forms wherein enmity to God can be expressed. And we should stand in awe of a nature, that under any circumstances is capable of such a monstrous exhibition as that which Herod presented. Alas ! as it respects the inward movements of the heart, we may discern the very same evils. Ambition fires the breast of man ; revenge finds a ready dwelling in the sinner's heart ; love of power mingles itself in every affection and desire ; resentment at controul, disappointment, or dispute, sits brooding in the soul ; cruelty, injustice, and selfishness, flow from these sources ; and we may discover in the sinner's natural state, the embryo of what we contemplate with so much horror in Herod. How carefully then should we guard against whatever might give a finished form, or expression, to such

a monstrous production. Is it not equally manifest in respect of the disposition of man towards Christ, that Herod's passions are existent in us, so long as we are unregenerate? We naturally dread the rise and kingdom of Messiah, because it threatens the destruction of what we call our own possessions. We are *troubled* by tidings which proclaim his advancing day : the appearance of his power in the conversion of any fellow sinner, or in the dispensation of a faithful gospel, is unwelcome, and opposed, because it interferes with our present gratifications in the flesh ; and when his second advent is spoken of, with all its glorious accompaniments, immediately the uneasiness of nature is betrayed, and we are disposed either to doubt, or to *wish* to doubt, the reality of these prospects ; and were it in our power, we would destroy this purpose, because we anticipate that it comes with destruction to us. Such is the *natural* inclination and emotion of an unchanged heart. Yet it is not always at once openly betrayed. Men can still seek for a season to mask their deadly feelings under a plausible appearance of *inquiring*, and a pretence, that if satisfied of the truth of these revelations, they would themselves become disciples. This deception may for a little while impose on the unsuspecting followers of the Lamb ; but God is not mocked, and the deceiver will not be allowed to pass undetected : detection however will usually be followed by desperation, and the hypocrite's mask will be exchanged for the avowed habit of the prosecutor. Such is the manifestation of sinful nature, of which every age of the world will furnish examples.

But how profitable might such a history be rendered, were we to mix faith in what we hear or read, believing the truth of the testimony, not only as it bears upon human nature in general, but

of the particular attendants upon such a state, as altogether miserable. We may be fully assured, that wherever natural passions domineer, there must be a state of misery; it is not in the nature of such masters to impart comfort or peace; and he is of all men most destitute of enjoyment, who is the slave or sport of the various humours, suspicions, and lusts, which belong to a distempered soul. Who then would covet the appellation of *great* as bestowed upon Herod! Who would put it into a comparison with that of *just* bestowed on Joseph! How much more abundant in real happiness was the persecuted than the persecutor; and how false is the estimate we put upon character, or condition, if we look only to the outward circumstances of men. It is in fact better to have a name amongst saved sinners—convinced and contrite souls, than to be laden with the honours of this perishing world; and even in this life, the history of the *bosom* would speedily decide, that he only is happy whose soul is in peace and fellowship with God. Let us therefore be persuaded to quit vain projects for worldly greatness, and to seek sanctifying grace, loving to sit at the feet of Jesus, and to seek the honour which cometh from God only.

The counsel of our Lord should on this occasion be called to mind, “Beware of the leaven of Herod.” If we embrace the profession of Christ’s name, let us remember we cannot unite his service with that of the world. There is a kind of *convenient* religion, and an *accommodating* conscience in some persons, which serves them, as occasions for this world may require, either appearing or retreating, speaking or keeping silence, as *present interests* may dictate; and innumerable are the instances, wherein such persons strive to believe, that occasional conformities with an evil world, or with the company they are in, or with the religious opinions

of those amongst whom they live, is admissible. They will be zealous upon points, or in society, where it may recommend them as liberal or enlightened, and will have no objection to give their energy to build and decorate some form of religion or place of worship, but they are not disposed to relinquish earth, and its smiles and possessions, for Christ alone. This state of mind is frequently hid under very plausible appearances; therefore the principle is called *leaven*, it works insidiously, and if it be not destroyed, will destroy, conducting the soul into all manner of delusion, and to final reprobacy. Jesus requires of his people true, pure, unconditional, hearty love, and devotion: a division of the heart he will not endure. Neither can any man “serve *two masters*.” Decision will be productive of increase and peace in the Lord. Let us then pray to be delivered from the abomination of an evil heart, and beware of the passions, and of the doctrines of Herod, lest we be corrupted in the same depravity, or perish in the same pit.

PRAYER.

Most gracious and merciful God, grant that on all occasions we may delight in having an access to Thee with the burdens of our hearts, and that we may bring them unto Thee in a spirit of true devotion, believing Thy power and willingness to save and help us. We pray Thee to give us an unfeigned conviction of the evil that is in us as sinners, and to enter upon our affections with Thy sanctifying grace. And when we read of the awfully depraved passions of men, O give us to feel that we are debtors to Thy infinite mercy, if we have been preserved from the deeds which they have done. Teach us, O Lord, to form a

just estimate of human nature, and not to vaunt ourselves as if any good thing dwelt in us; for alas, O Lord, we are only evil and that continually. We confess with shame and sorrow, that there are passions of ambition, revenge, selfishness, and all corruption in us, which but for thy restraining mercy might have hurried us into the most destructive crimes. O receive our grateful tribute for these compassions, and add to them, O Lord, the power of Thy converting grace, that we may not only be kept from evil, but be sanctified unto good. We would consecrate unto Thee every feeling and interest that we have. O receive us wholly, and elevate our desires to the glorious world above, teaching us where true greatness and real happiness are to be found, even in Thy blessed self. We praise Thee, O Lord, for having called us into the knowledge of Thy salvation, and that Thou hast taken away our natural aversion to things spiritual, so that it is no trouble to us to hear of Him in whom the reign of holiness shall be established. We rejoice in tidings of Thy victories. We are glad at the sound of Thy voice in the gospel of salvation; and we hail the day when Thou wilt come in Thy glory, and triumph in the destruction of sin. Blessed be Thy Omnipotent love and grace for effecting in our hearts these dispositions of faith. O perfect them, gracious God, and satisfy them by continual displays of Thy dominion, and by coming quickly in Thy kingdom. Amen.

THE WISE MEN FROM THE EAST.

Matt. ii. 1—12.

THERE is something so instructive in the spirit of the wise men from the East, that we cannot pass by their conduct without giving it our particular attention : and although the history which respects them is very short, we may dwell upon the few verses which respect them with profit. They are described as *wise* men, and are said to come from the East. It is probable that they dwelt in Persia, and might belong to a sect called Magians, which is a word signifying *wise*. This sect professed an utter abhorrence of all image worship ; but they had not, as a body, the light of true religion. They believed that there were two supreme Principles, one good and the other evil ; and they worshipped the good under the element of fire. Amongst these men were many philosophers and men respected for learning, and some who had views approaching nearer to truth than was the general case with the heathen. The wise men of whom we read in this chapter had evidently some acquaintance with the Jewish Scriptures and expectations, and probably partook also of the opinion which generally prevailed amongst men at the time of Jesus' birth, that some extraordinary person was about to appear in the world. These would be subordinate means of preparation to their minds for what was about to be revealed to them ; but in addition to these, it appears undeniably that they were under a supernatural influence and preparation of heart, for the saving revelation of Jesus to their souls. These influences were attended with that supernatural appearance in the heavens,

which attracted their notice, and which by divine influence upon their minds they immediately concluded to be the heavenly token of the birth of that king of Israel, of whom they had heard. Under this impression they resolved upon taking their journey to Jerusalem, that they might be amongst those who hailed him as prince; and with this design they furnished themselves with the presents usually presented in those countries to kings,—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When arrived in Jerusalem they instantly put their important question, most probably expecting to find all the inhabitants of the city engaged in rejoicing and tributes of honour to the new born king; but, instead of this, their communication threw the whole city into consternation and surprise; and they were dismissed to go and search for this expected wonder in the city of which prophecy had spoken, for Bethlehem was the place where Messiah was to come. Not discouraged by this disappointment of their hopes, they left Jerusalem, and prosecuted their further inquiry; when, to their exceeding great joy, on leaving the city, they were cheered by the sight of the same star which had appeared to them in their own land, and which now acted as a guide to their steps, moving onwards before them, until reaching the habitation where Jesus was, it was arrested in its way, and stood over the hallowed spot. Being thus conducted by a supernatural guide, they entered the dwelling in the confidence of faith; and finding the young child, they prostrated themselves before him, and worshipped him, opening their treasures, and presenting him their willing tribute and gifts. It was their intention to obey the charge given them by Herod, and to return to Jerusalem to testify of Jesus; but being warned by the Lord in a dream not to communicate these tidings to the king, they returned into their own country another way.

Here no doubt they would more freely communicate what they had seen and heard, and would thus become instrumental in preparing the way for the acceptance of Messiah the Prince and Saviour. .

We have no account from the Holy Ghost of the state of feeling belonging individually to these men, previously to the appearance of the star and their journey to Jerusalem ; but we have a sufficient evidence, after that period, of the genuine and saving experience of their souls. It is also evident that they possessed a teachable spirit, and were at least shaken from their bondage to the superstitions of their country. It is possible that they might be more than this ; but we are not at liberty to present conjectures as if they were truths ; and since the Holy Spirit has been silent upon this subject, we can do no more than form a judgment of character according to what is written. Their favourable reception of the Hebrew expectations, and their unison of interest with that nation, in the hopes built on Messiah, would lead us to believe, that they possessed a degree of illumination, although possibly they might have the prejudice which prevailed in Israel, and be looking for a *temporal* kingdom. However this might be, the excellent graces of teachableness, industry, and obedience, are conspicuous. They obeyed the heavenly vision ; they undertook a long and expensive journey ; they cherished lively and fervent expectations ; they surmounted the difficulties of their way, and the discouragement which met them where they had looked for rest ; they persisted in the exercise of faith, patience, and labour ; and when they at length obtained the end of their anxious inquiry, instead of being offended at the meanness of the abode, the poverty of the exterior of Christ's condition, or the obscurity of his birth and parentage, their faith penetrated this dark dis-

guise, apprehended the glorious truth veiled as it was, believed the supernatural witness which had been given to this babe, and proffered the royal gifts. They immediately embraced the interests of this heavenly stranger, obeyed the divine counsel, and prepared to return to their own land in the joy of holy spiritual honour, rather than to be laden with the rewards and favour of Herod the king. These are all very lovely and precious fruits of that blessed operation of the Spirit, by which Jesus is revealed to the inner man ; and afford us a welcome demonstration of the covenant grace that is sealed in Christ, and which embraces the *Gentile* earth, constituting Him Lord and King of a people gathered out of every kindred and clime.

The presents which the wise men proffered were expressive, not only of the honour they would ascribe to him as the royal prince, but of some of those important offices which Jesus fills for his redeemed, and which are continually proclaimed and represented in every varied form throughout the Scriptures. He is to his people Prophet, Priest, and King, and we may with propriety hail him in this threefold relation to us, under the several emblems of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. His kingly splendour is well represented by the gold, for his government is as *God* over all blessed for evermore. His priestly sacrifice stands before us in the expressive frankincense, for it is the offering of a sweet savour to God, a meritorious, fragrant, costly oblation, that prevaleth to propitiate and obtain all blessing for man. His prophetic office may be well compared to the healing myrrh, for in his counsels there is health to the soul, a heavenly impartation of wisdom that delivers from the destroying effects of ignorance and sin ! We therefore as believers can combine with our view of the worshipping Magi, and their gifts, extensive

spiritual conceptions, given us through the increased light which has dawned upon us in the advancing kingdom and glory of Messiah. And great is our privilege, if we can read this growing testimony of the early scenes of Jesus with hearts that beat in unison with those subjects of his empire, and with the prophetic testimony accomplished in the heavenly king.

We must not however take it for granted that we possess this congeniality with the true disciples, until we have examined the ground on which we would establish the likeness ; and in this attempt, we may profitably compare the Lord's dealings with the wise men, with what we have experienced in our course as Christians.

There is a preparation of heart which cometh from the Lord, and is usually experienced by all the vessels of mercy previously to their clearer views of the Gospel. This is dispensed variously according to our dispositions or circumstances, but always in such a way as to produce a *loosing* of prejudices, and of our adherence to false confidences. This may be effected through study, or through affliction, or through mortification in the creature, or through the letter of the word, or any other means effecting a conviction of the vanity of created finite objects, and begetting a certain solicitude in the heart for something which may satisfy. In this way the Lord has frequently demonstrated his sovereign power over a sinner's conscience, judgment and affections, even when the individual has been ignorant of the meaning of his own experience, and been placed in circumstances least likely to be thus visited. Persons in the midst of the heathen, in the bondage of foul heresies, in the power of the world, under the night of prejudice, in captivity to the flesh, have been the subjects of this operation, and, under a

restless sense of dissatisfaction in what they *are*, become prepared by the Spirit for being what they ought to be. The Lord has his own means for imparting the further necessary light, and will certainly give it in due time. The Scriptures are usually the instrument most serviceable, acting towards the soul as the star in the heavens to the eastern Magi. These become increasingly interesting, attract more particular attention, suggest certain truths which it becomes important to the now awakened mind to ascertain and verify; and they fulfil in this case the Apostle's description of them, as a sure word of prophecy, comparable to a light which shineth in a dark place, unto which he declares we do well to give heed, until the day dawn and the day star arise in our hearts. Obediently to this counsel, the believer's inquiring soul is led to investigate the divine revelation, and to perceive that it clearly testifies of one who is *king*. Under this advanced state, the next resolve is to set out on our pilgrimage in search of this object of faith, and to seek him until he be found, honoured, and worshipped; and correspondently with this resolution the journey is undertaken, the soul is willing to go forth upon arduous inquiries, to seek information in the appointed means of grace, to inquire of those whose profession and office should make them able to give instruction, and to profess the honest intention of the heart to worship Jesus. These are some of the steps by which the Lord is conducting the regenerate soul to the full revelation of his gracious character; and here we may pause, and ask ourselves if so far we have traced our *own* steps? have we been rendered thus uneasy, and been loosened from the confidence wherein we were once comparatively at rest? has this liberation from the dominion of former prejudices been followed by teachable inquiry after truth? Have we

obeyed the result of that inquiry by increased and visible diligence? And are we now in the midst as it were of Jerusalem, asking for him of whom the Prophets speak—looking for Jesus? :

It is not improbable that here we may sometimes meet an unexpected disappointment. A newly awakened inquirer is apt to imagine that others, especially such as make a high profession of religion, will of course be as full of the subject which interests him as he is himself, and hastens to such places of resort as seem likely to introduce him to knowledge; but alas! too often his inquiries and his fervour occasion surprise, and trouble, and contempt; and these persons are more ignorant than himself, and less alive to the interesting question. Yet even here he may obtain some little increase to his store by listening to their account of what the scriptures say; and if we are teachable, and intent upon finding our Lord, we shall not tarry long to wonder at their ignorance, or to express our censure of them: but hasting to the path-way which the Spirit has pointed out, we shall prosecute our own journey. A simplicity and diligence of this description will receive the Lord's approving witness, and he will meet us in the way with a renewed manifestation of his divine tokens and guidance; and having exercised our patience, and tried our faith, he will lead us to him whom we seek. Blessed be his name, when thus conducted by the Holy Ghost, we are not offended by difficulties, or by any unexpected attendant upon the kingdom of Christ. Very possibly when Jesus is found, he may not be altogether such an one as in our ignorance we had expected; and there may be some circumstances of humiliation in our Lord's kingdom and requirements, which may be surprising to nature; but grace will make the heart submissive, and lead it into entire approval of whatever belongs to the dispensation of Christ's

government, for believers love their Lord in all situations, honour him in all conditions, and realize the true glory which belongs to his spiritual dominion. They also know that his humiliation was voluntary and for them, and that it is transitory, yielding to a manifestation of glory unsearchable, which he has obtained as Mediator, and will display ere long as universal king. It may be that he will call them to forego earthly honour, to encounter human scorn, to cast in their lot with him as exposed to present evils ; but, they also know that they share with him in his final kingdom, being appointed to inherit all things in him ; they therefore hail and worship him with prostrate loving hearts, and “nothing shall offend them.” Can we take the consolation which is afforded to souls thus taught ? and are we indeed amongst those whose hearts lie prostrate at the Saviour’s feet, whose affections are his in wedded faithfulness and truth ?

Let not a desponding sigh arise as if we were too poor to bring him any costly offering. We have no gold, no frankincense, no myrrh, but we have richer treasure in the Saviour’s eye, for he looks on the broken heart, beholds the tears of contrition, listens to each anxious sigh, and observes the conflicting spirit. These are precious sacrifices as the fruit of his own grace in us ; and if they are offered truly, they *do* express all that the wise men’s tribute typified ; they are tributes to Jesus as king, as priest, as prophet—for they rise to him in confession of his power, in dependence upon his merit, and in longings for his counsel. Let us not therefore despond or distrust, but come to him such as we are, and give him all we have.

PRAYER.

O EVER merciful and blessed Lord, guide us by Thy heavenly counsels, and in Thy infinite compassion look upon and love us as vessels of mercy; send out Thy light and truth, and thus conduct us to the resting place which Thou hast provided for the weary; and O do Thou make us to continue restless until we find our repose in Thee. We ask Thee to loosen the fetters and bonds which keep us in any degree under the power of ignorance, prejudice, or the world; and to bring us out into that holy liberty which belongs to the sons of God. Awaken us to serious inquiries after that dear and blessed Lord, who has afforded us so many witnesses of himself; and make us to follow the testimony as contained in Thy word, seeking for Jesus as our All in All. We have nothing to bring Thee, O Lord, in which Thou canst delight, excepting as Thou wilt accept Thy own work in us. We, alas! are poor and miserable, yet Thou wilt not despise the heart that has been broken by the Spirit's convicting grace. Such hearts, O Jesus, we now bring and place at Thy feet—spurn them not from Thee, for they are wretched without Thee! O bring Thy healing mercies near, take up the miserable sacrifice, and let us experience Thy matchless love which is ready to put the broken heart into Thine. Saviour, there let ours abide; give them a place in Thy bosom; and O heal their diseases, quiet their griefs, and bind them up in the life that has been purchased by Thee. We desire henceforth to own Thee as our king, and to demonstrate how entirely we kiss Thy sceptre, and confess Thy rule; enable us to accomplish this desire, by imparting to us Thy indwelling strength; and O, ever merciful and patient friend

of our souls, bear with us, and bless us, and own that we are Thy disciples indeed ! Thus, O gracious God, we hang upon Thee, and devote ourselves to Thee. Never forsake us, never forget us, O Jesus, the journey through ; but in all our steps, in all our difficulties, in all our discouragements, appear in our behalf, and shine into our hearts with Thy counsels and upholding care, for Thy tender pity's sake. Amen.

JOHN THE BAPTIST. :

Luke i. 5—25, 57—66, 76—80. Matt. iii. 1—15.
John i. 6, 7, 15—36; iii. 23—36. Mark vi.
16—29. Matt. xvii. 12, 13.

As it is our design, in the present course of subjects, to investigate character, placing before us the regular thread of historical statement which we find in the scriptures, respecting those persons who are introduced to our attention, we must enter upon the view of John Baptist, by beginning with the record of him in Luke's gospel. St. Matthew does not afford us any particulars of his history previously to his entrance on public ministry; but the important account of his more youthful days, and of his birth, is given us in full by St. Luke. Here we find that John was a child consecrated to God from his conception, and under a peculiar blessing and appointment, as the forerunner of the Messiah. His parents, Zecharias and Elizabeth, were aged persons, having no children until the birth of this son, who was given by peculiar favour from the Lord, described in his character and office at the time when the promise of his birth was given. Zecharias being a priest, was engaged in officiating in the temple, burning incense within the holy place, whilst the people were worshipping in the outward court, when suddenly there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. We do not, in this place, consider the state or feelings of Zecharias; we rest therefore upon the angel's communication respecting John. He informed him that he should have a son whom he should call John, which signifies, "Grace or

favour of God ; " that much joy would be attendant upon the birth of this child, which joy would be justified, for he should be great in the sight of the Lord. He must be trained up as a Nazarite, for from the time of his conception he would be filled with the Holy Ghost, that he might suitably discharge the office to which he was appointed, turning the hearts of many of the children of Israel to their fathers, God making ready a people prepared for the Lord. The unbelief of Zecharias brought on him, as we shall consider in a future portion, a visitation of chastisement from God, making him deaf and dumb until the promise should be accomplished. Accordingly he remained so until the birth of the child, when his mouth was opened, and he named his son, John, according to the command of the Lord ; and being filled by the Holy Ghost, he spake in an inspired voice, proclaiming the faithfulness of God, and the honour put upon this child, who should be called the prophet of the Highest, going before him to prepare the way by testifying of his salvation, and of the remission of sins in him. These events attracted general attention ; and they who heard the report of them laid them up in their hearts, wondering what manner of child this should be. The education of John was not according to the usual custom with the Hebrew youth. His ministry and course were to be peculiar, and his habits were those of privacy and mortification. He " was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel," where he grew and waxed strong in spirit. His entrance upon public labour is presented to us in Matt. iii. where we are informed that the burden of his message was *repentance* : he cried aloud through the wilderness, " Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." His external appearance corresponded with the spirit of his ministry, it was one of extreme mortification ; his raiment was

of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins, and his meat was locusts and wild honey. The whole region of Judea was in a state of excitement on hearing his voice ; and great numbers resorted to him, confessing their sins, and being baptized of him in Jordan. Whilst John was thus engaged, Jesus, being now ready to begin his mission of life and mercy to man, drew near to be baptized ; when, by an immediate revelation, he was made acquainted with the dignity of his person and office, and with reverential humility would have declined the service, declaring he had need to be baptized of him, and that it seemed unsuitable for the Messiah thus to condescend to his servant. His own reasonings, however, were surrendered, when Jesus enforced and explained the reasons for this observance of the rite ; and John's faith was confirmed and cheered by seeing the visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon the head of the Saviour, and hearing the Father's voice of complacent love in the Son sounding from heaven. The ministry of John continued three years and a half, and was filled with laborious zeal and simplicity. On all occasions he testified of Jesus as the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world. He ever declared his own subordination to the great Messiah ; spoke of himself as the friend of the Bridegroom ; as rejoicing in his advancing greatness ; as willing to be obscured or eclipsed by the superior glory of the Highest, and that his own office was that of a herald preparing the way for a king ; that, in fact, in him was fulfilled the prophetic promise, for he was the Voice crying in the wilderness, as Isaiah had predicted, Isa. xl. 3—11. The labours of John were closed by the persecutor. His faithful remonstrances against the crimes of Herod Antipas brought on him the indignation of that prince, and he was cast into prison. There he is supposed to have re-

mained a year, and seems to have had liberty to receive his friends, for it was from his prison that he sent his disciples to Jesus, for their satisfaction respecting his Messiahship. The rage of his adversaries, however, did not stop here. Herodias, on whose account John had rebuked Herod, cherished a deadly hatred against him, and on the first favourable opportunity procured his death, by entangling Herod in a hasty oath. John was accordingly beheaded in the prison, and his head brought to his insulting foes. And when his disciples heard of the bloody deed, they assembled together, and affectionately buried his lifeless corpse.

These particulars present us with a person peculiarly suitable for the office to which he was appointed; shewing us the wonderful wisdom and power of the Lord, who so ably fits his instruments to their several services. He was an elect soul, foreordained to the great work allotted him; and, in this respect, was *great*, having *favour with God*. His greatness was, like that of all saints, *spiritual* in its character, for distinction of worldly splendour and pomp he had not; but he was filled with the Holy Ghost, even from the beginning of his existence; so that the mighty work of regeneration, and the divine impartation of heavenly gifts, distinguished him from the earliest period, working in him to the reduction of the old nature, and to the energetic possession and display of supernatural talents and powers. By this favour he was preserved as a Nazarite, and received his knowledge independently of the common process of teaching, being under an anointing from the Holy Ghost, and thereby elevated to high attainments in the Lord, high association with the Lord, and blessed privileges, rendering his days in the desert days of fruitfulness, joy, and peace. By these divine

communications Jehovah was pleased to satisfy his soul, so that he was kept from seeking the society of youth or the pleasures of this world; being content with his portion in God. There can be no wonder that a course so peculiar, following upon the well-known circumstances of his birth, should attract observation; and no doubt Jehovah designed to give him attractions, and to fix the eyes of men upon him by these preparatory evidences of favour, in order to render his ministry the more commanding. He was in truth every thing that belonged to the order of Nazarites as instituted in the law, see Numbers vi; exercising abstinence, deadness to worldly customs and maxims, separation from sinners dead in their trespasses, crucifixion of natural affections; and he was privileged to inherit, in the Spirit, all those promises which were veiled in the type of old, partaking of the *better*, the *new* wine of Christ's kingdom, and feasting upon joys which the world can never give!

We must remember that all this was bestowed upon John in honour of the *office* he bore. Prophecy has been very express upon the divine purpose in respect of the advent of Messiah, and has furnished us with an enlarged view of the accompaniments of that great event. The passage referred to already, in Isa. xl. 3. leads the church to look for some herald who shall proclaim the approach of the Lord. The prophet Malachi is also inspired to testify, that, before the coming of the Lord the Messenger of the covenant, another messenger should be sent preparing his way, Mal. iii. 1. And, in Mal. iv. 5, 6, Jehovah promises to send Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great day of the Lord; and that he should turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, &c. It is probable that there may be a further accomplishment of these prophecies, in their bearing upon

the second advent of Christ, which is, in so many of its particulars, typified as it were by his first advent: but assuredly there *has* been a fulfilment of those engagements, since John Baptist expressly appropriates the prophecies to himself; and Jesus, answering the question of his disciples, Matt. xvii. 10—13, declares that Elias is come already—speaking of John the Baptist. He came in the spirit and power of Elijah; his ministry corresponded with that of the ancient prophets, and was one of rebuke and severity. Our Lord, in Matt. xi. 7—11, gives a high testimony of John, declaring him to be *more* than a prophet, in that he was in office the messenger spoken of in prophecy; and elevates him amongst the greatest ever born of woman, declaring also, “this is Elias which was for to come;” see verse 14. His distinctions, therefore, were all of free grace, owing to a fore-ordaining act of God, and belonging to the covenant arrangement which respects his office as Christ’s forerunner, and his sanctification as a chosen consecrated vessel, through the regeneration of the Spirit. By these eternal purposes he was, as the record of him declares in its several parts, a *just* man, Mark vi. 20; coming in the way of righteousness, Matt. xxi. 32; a burning light, John v. 35; a faithful witness, John v. 33; and constraining the witness from men of his integrity and high calling, Matt. xxi. 26.

If we examine the history of John’s proceedings with attention, we shall discover the full establishment of these testimonies in his favour, by the whole tenour of his equal and holy course. It is evident that he possessed a steadfast power of self-government, by which he persisted in all the acts of self-denial which were required from him. His soul was filled with intense devotion to its calling, and with an entire indifference to every other object. Love for the purpose of God, and zeal for the

precious Lamb, glowed in his bosom, purifying him from self-seeking, from love of popularity, and keeping him from all rivalry of the Lord. Instead of being flattered by the attention of men, he was solicitous to divert them from himself to the greater and only true object of attraction, affectionately and faithfully reminding his followers of his constant instruction respecting the person of Christ, and urging upon them to be satisfied with his decreasing honour with men, rejoicing in the increase of Christ. When attended by Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism, instead of being induced to speak smooth things, or to feel gratified by their apparent conviction, he faithfully addressed them in terms calculated to deepen their pangs of remorse, and to put them upon increased exercises of penitence; shewing also to all who attended his baptism, that this rite was merely introductory, and an expressive sign of the dispositions becoming those who felt a need of being washed from their sins; but that the baptism of the *Holy Ghost* was needful for their salvation, which could only be bestowed by Him of whom he came to witness. With wise and judicious discrimination he addressed his different hearers according to their circumstances and case; shewing to all the solemn call which was now addressed to them, and the necessity of acting with integrity before God. Let us not however, suppose that John dealt only in anathemas and denunciations; it is true his ministry savoured of severity, for it was a call to penitence: but it was a severity richly imbued with love and charity; for he testified of the *Lamb*—of the *Bridegroom*—exhorted sinners to look to Jesus as the willing sacrifice and Saviour—and, as Zecharias had prophesied, fulfilled his ministry by “giving knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins through the tender mercy

of our God," Luke i. 77, 78. In *this* spirit he prepared the Lord's way as his anointed instrument, not only to convict, but to instruct in the way of peace; not only to rebuke, but to comfort, by pointing to the Lamb. We may say of John that his style was bold, convicting, personal, severe, and denouncing, as Matt. iii. 7—12; but tender, sympathetic, and affectionately laborious, as John i. 29. We find that in his more private instructions, he taught his disciples to pray and fast, Luke xi. 1. Mark ii. 18. These were suitable expressions of that spirit of humiliation and dependance which he inculcated. In his own career he was delivered from the fear of man, or dread of personal dangers; therefore he was as free to rebuke the prince as the peasant; contentedly dwelt in his prison; and calmly surrendered his life to the murderer; thus sealing his testimony as a martyr for the truth, and finishing his course in the faithful strength of the same Holy Ghost, who was with him in its beginning—a blessed consecrated channel, through whose soul, we may say, the Spirit flowed from the rise to the close of life, with one uninterrupted communication of mercy, grace, and strength—and by whom, that same blessed Spirit was pleased to witness to other men, of the greatness and grace of the everlasting salvation in covenant love.

Notwithstanding the peculiarities belonging to the history and experience of John Baptist, there are many things which are imitable and instructive, and to which the Christian may profitably turn his thoughts. We may not be appointed to sustain the more important offices in life, or in the ministry of the gospel; but we have all a discipleship to maintain, in which we require the Spirit who upheld John; and should exhibit the dispositions for which he was eminent. If we are called into fellowship with the servants of the Lord, our

privilege is bestowed consequently upon the divine purpose of electing grace ; for of all the vessels of mercy it is written, " Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world ;" and we should at all times recognize this family distinction, whenever we consider the subject of salvation. Revelation teaches us in all things to realize that times, seasons, appointments, gifts, are all according to the arrangement of eternal infinite wisdom ; and this consideration is enough, not only to cause glory to God as the sovereign Lord, but comfort to us as dependant upon an unchangeable will. Whether therefore we are called to the more public, or the more private course of the Christian faith, we may look for supplies of the Spirit that correspond with our necessity.

* It is a high distinction and mercy, when the Lord is pleased from childhood to visit the soul with the Holy Ghost ; and when from the earliest period of existence sweet influences of the grace of the covenant are visible ; and we should pray for such a baptism to rest upon our own offspring, and the children that are around us. It is possible for the Lord still to visit his creatures as he did John, filling them with the Holy Ghost from their mother's womb ; and faith should prompt us to wrestlings of earnest prayer, that this power and grace may be bestowed upon the objects of our suit ; nor should we ever cease to supplicate the Lord for this regeneration, without which the child can never inherit the eternal kingdom. Alas ! we have full manifestation of this in the characters of children who are destitute of this operation, and whose opening faculties are too often seen in a frightful developement of passions, principles, and propensities opposed to the Lord, and to every thing spiritually excellent. But however the Lord may be pleased to dispense his gifts, and at whatever period he may visit his redeemed with

the Holy Ghost, this gift will effect the dispositions of a lamb, and a saint will exhibit in his ordained course exactly the same affections as were estimable in John. It is the delight of those new principles to adhere to their author, therefore regeneration produces consecration ; and the believer has the *spirit* of a Nazarite. Self-government, mortification to earth, separation from the world, habits of abstinence or moderation, and the regulation of the natural affections will attend the new creation in Christ ; and, whilst dwelling here below, such an one will consider the whole world as a desert in a spiritual sense, wherein he has to pass the time of his sojourning in godly fear and vigilance, and to cause the voice of his testimony to be heard wherever he sojourns. His words, his conversation, will cry aloud like John, “Repent ye”—will urge like John, “Prepare the way of the Lord!”—and will direct as he did, saying, “Behold the Lamb!” These are duties within the compass of the humblest Christian, and incumbent even upon the child in pilgrimage ; and if we have the Holy Ghost, we shall experience a pressing necessity within our hearts, arising from charity and devotion ; urging us upon the duty, and animating us in its discharge with perseverance and decision. There can be no occupation so refreshing or loved by the true disciple, as that of seeking to win sinners from the error of their way, and lead them to the Lamb : and, notwithstanding the peril which attends all who adventure upon this work of mercy, there is a holy enjoyment imparted in the midst even of suffering in this cause, which compensates for all the labour or pain. The habits of mortification, and personal religion, in which the soul has been exercised, serve as blessed means of preparation for whatever apparent evil may attend our witness for Christ before men. He who has been accustomed to live in the world

as a *desert*, is not unfitted for a *prison* : he who has been in the habit of living upon scanty or common fare, is prepared for a prisoner's allotted food : he, who has exercised his affections to quit creaturely enjoyments for communion and fellowship with God, is ready for the season when he may be torn from their embrace by violence, and committed to solitude or circumscribed intercourse. Not that *habits alone* will invest us with strength for an evil day ; but they are good preparatives for further suffering : and the Holy Ghost acknowledges them in his power. We ought therefore to cultivate this personal discipline, and always to strive after the power of exhibiting in our own conduct the lessons we inculcate on others.

We have very extensive instruction in the duties incumbent upon the minister by the course which was appointed for John. Such persons as are looking to fill this sacred calling, should cheerfully devote their preparatory years of youth and education, to this great object ; relinquish the pleasures and pursuits of other young persons ; and be willing to sacrifice the society and associations which might otherwise be gratifying. Their calling is high and spiritual, their studies should be devotional and regular ; that the mind may be imbued with the experimental knowledge of the heavenly life ; and the ministry be entered in a spirit *strong in the Lord*. The public witness must agree with the voice of John, reproving for sin, impartially applying the word, being no respecter of persons, and combining the terrors of the law with the sweet sounds of the gospel. A spirit of disinterested integrity must attend the course of labour, wherein *self* is kept down, put in the back ground ; and whilst the *office* is magnified, so far as it is appointed of God, the thought of *personal* exaltation must be abhorrent to the mind. Hence a true labourer will carefully guard against

egotism, fearing the least approach to what might render *himself* a prominent object. His commission is to *preach the Lamb*; and his honest zeal will be to fulfil this commission; contentedly retiring that *Jesus* may be all. A principal branch of his testimony will be to the *Holy Ghost* as the blessed gift bestowed by the Saviour; the necessity of receiving him as a purifying baptism will be insisted upon; and the minister will carefully show, that all his own labours are but preparatory means, leading to the great end of being anointed by the Holy Ghost, from Jesus the only effectual Teacher, the only Saviour. Thus we have the instructive and acceptable counsel by which the pathway of a minister is pointed out, teaching us for what we should wait and look, in the dispensation of the Gospel of peace to our souls.

But let us not be looking for a similar ministration from the ministers in our own day to the neglect of that ministry which John himself is appointed to deliver to *us*; for the words spoken by him reach to the end of time, and convey forcible appeals to us individually. We are warned by the sacred testimony to flee from the wrath to come, to repent, to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and to look for the baptism of the Holy Ghost. We are directed to behold the Lamb, to expect remission of sins only by him, and to hail him as the bridegroom of his church. We are therefore called upon powerfully to examine ourselves, and to ascertain whether we have complied with these requirements, being quickened and led by the eternal Spirit in our souls. If such be our experience, we shall advance still further; we shall be privileged in our turn to become the faithful witnesses for Christ; and we shall be able to rejoice in the blissful possession of those distinctions whereby the saints of Jesus are exalted, and shall finish their course with joy. These are

the precious subjects on which faith and love may act to the establishment of our consolation even in the most perilous times; and we have only to desire that the anointing from heaven may be 'upon us : thus all shall be well, and the eternal mansions be opened to receive us amongst the blood-bought saints.

P R A Y E R.

ALMIGHTY God, we most earnestly implore Thee to abide with us as the heirs of Thy heavenly kingdom, and to visit us from day to day with the testimony of Thy love and peace. O that we may have a near access to Thee in all the days of our pilgrimage, and know Thee in the appropriation of faith. Mercifully impart the privilege. O graciously commune with us night and day! We confess, O Lord, that our course has been far from the holy equal devotion to Thee which is conspicuous in Thy servant whose pilgrimage we have now considered; yet Thou hast mercies which are large and free; and by these Thou canst visit us with invigorating grace. Grant therefore that the baptism of the Holy Ghost may now abide upon us, and that we may be filled with the Spirit; enable us to maintain our way in the fulness of this blessing, and to testify of Thee in devotion of heart and life. We desire to love the sacred abstraction which raises the soul to heavenly objects. We look, O Lord, for the enjoyments which are high and spiritual, as to the summit of our hopes. O nourish these affections within our hearts, and enable us to be joyful in these possessions, whatever may accompany our pilgrimage here. We bless Thee that our souls have been touched by Thy sacred influences, and can in some measure enter into the bliss awaiting Thy faithful

disciples. For every measure of these visitations we give Thee grateful praise ; and receive them as pledges of further blessings. O may we always trust Thee as a faithful Friend ; as one who will abide with us in all conditions ; and as an inexhaustible source from whence we may ever derive wisdom, holiness, and strength. For this lively hope we are wholly dependent upon the Spirit's grace ; vouchsafe therefore, O our God, to supply us according to Thy covenant, fixing our hearts in Thee. We would leave all our concerns in Thy blessed hands. We would commit every interest we have to Thy faithful keeping. O let us have peace in so doing, Thou eternal King, and live unto Thee as our Sacrifice, Saviour, and Life ! We ask these mercies in Thy own blessed Name. Amen :

SIMON PETER.

Matt. iv. 18.

THE character following in regular order, after John Baptist is Simon Peter's; but he is introduced to us by St. Matthew at a period of his life beyond that of his first acquaintance with Jesus. In John i. 41, we have the opening of his discipleship; where he is described as invited by his brother Andrew to come and see Jesus; and that having embraced the invitation, our Lord saluted him with a declaration of his name, and with the addition of that of Cephas, which in Syriac,* signifies a stone, as does Peter also in Greek. By this title the Lord intimated to him that he would prove a firm witness for the gospel of salvation. It appears that after this interview, Peter believed in Jesus; but that there was still much ignorance in his mind upon the nature of his ministry and kingdom. He did not yet embrace the service of the Lord by a regular, but only in occasional attendance on his steps; and he still followed his former occupation as a fisherman. He appears to have had his own house at Bethsaida, to have been a married man, and to have had his wife's mother residing with him; as see 1 Cor. ix. 5. Matt. viii. 14. But the Lord's design was to number Peter amongst those who should be his constant attendants and appointed witnesses; and shortly afterwards, he was pleased to call him, with the rest of the twelve, to associate himself more statedly with him. Of Peter's call, we read in Matt. iv. 18, with a more enlarged account in Luke v. 1—11, following upon an abased sense of his own vileness, attended with a willing relinquishment of all

secular avocations for the greater object of ministering in the things of Christ. The following year that more solemn appointment took place : whereⁱⁿ Jesus, choosing the twelve, named Peter as one ; see Matt. x. 1, 2. From this season we find Peter associated with our Lord and his little family, in all the variety of circumstances in which they were placed. In Matt. xiv. 22. we find him present when the miracle was performed, by which Christ fed the multitude, and accompanying the rest of the disciples, as constrained to enter the ship, leaving their master behind. On this occasion he displayed somewhat of that natural character which so peculiarly burst forth in many after occurrences. He was impetuous and forward ; and when Jesus drew near, in the midst of the contrary winds which baffled their attempt at the shore, and was seen walking on the sea ; he with the rest was at first superstitiously alarmed ; but soon exchanging his fears for other feelings, he requested permission, if indeed it was Jesus he beheld, to descend from the ship and join him on the sea. Having received the liberty to make the attempt, he was enabled for a little season to tread upon the waves ; but when he saw and felt the wind boisterous, his faith began to fail him, and he was ready to sink beneath the deep ; an importunate cry was uttered from his alarmed soul, that Jesus would save him. The arm of the Saviour was ready ; he was rescued from the peril, but rebuked for his fears. Immediately after this, Jesus addressed his important discourse as recorded John vi. and at the spirituality of which, many, even of his followers, took offence ; which gave occasion for the touching appeal of affection to the twelve, and to Peter's ready answer, " To whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life ; and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." A confession

of the person of our Lord which he afterwards repeated, as Matt. xvi. 16, receiving at the same time the Lord's approval and promise. The revelation is declared to be from the Father. Jesus here calls Peter, Simon Bar-Jonah, or Simon son of Jonas ; as much as to say, 'Thou art nothing in thyself, but a sinful child of a sinful stock ; thou art *blessed* by an act of grace, and hast obtained thy spiritual discernment by supernatural power. The confession however was sound and pure ; a confession of the Lord as the Messiah, on whom as on an immovable rock, the Church shall be built. Peter's confession was in correspondence with his new name ; and as he had been the first thus to make a clear acknowledgment of the mystery of redemption in the Saviour, he should be the instrument of first opening the kingdom of grace, both to the Jewish and Gentile lands. Thus the keys of the kingdom would be lodged as it were in his opening ministry ; a promise which we find accomplished after the ascension of our Lord. After this privilege promised to Peter, Jesus spake more openly of the approaching sufferings through which his kingdom would be established ; and Peter, forgetting the decorum and reverence due to our Lord, began to rebuke him, and to deprecate such visitations coming upon him. Such a spirit and conduct received an unusually severe reproof. Jesus addressed him as speaking for Satan, and as an offence to him. He seems to have received the rebuke in meekness, and to have listened with attention to our Lord's further observations. We next meet with Peter, admitted with James and John to the mount, where Christ was transfigured. He with the others experienced on that occasion the overpowering effects of the vision ; but in the fervour of his delight in the manifested glory of Jesus, he proposed to build three tabernacles, wherein his Lord,

and Moses, and Elias, might abide, and they, his favoured disciples, continually behold the glory. The language of heart and lips was, "It is good to be here;" but in this it is declared he spake *ignorantly*. Ere this chapter closes, Peter is before us, under some anxiety respecting the payment of tribute; but acting in teachableness and faith. Again we find him putting an important question to Christ respecting the forgiveness of injuries. Matt. xviii. 21: and in Matt. xix. 27, disposed to count much of the sacrifices he and his companions had made in following the Lord. In Mark xi. 21, his natural character is still conspicuous. His observation was instantly attracted to the blasted fig-tree; his curiosity was active, prompting him to wish for information respecting the times and seasons of the divine visitations. Matt. xiii. 4. He was one of the disciples sent by our Lord to prepare the last supper. Luke xxii. 8. And it was he who so impetuously expressed his determination that Jesus should never stoop to wash his feet. John xiii. 6; being as vehement afterwards in desiring the blessing. During the supper, the minds of all the disciples were much distressed by the Lord's declaration, that one of them should betray him; but even at this moment, Peter's impatience absorbed every other feeling, and he beckoned to John, who lay on Jesus' breast, to ask him to satisfy his anxiety, by telling him who it should be. With equal impatience he pressed to know whither it was that Christ intended to withdraw; and with violent asseverations, mixed with some unworthy comparison of himself with the other disciples, he declared his own faithfulness to be immovable; so that, though all should forsake the Lord, yet would not he. Notwithstanding the solemn assurance of Christ to the contrary, and the declaration that Satan had peculiarly desired to have him, he obstinately persisted in

his boasted firmness and attachment, affirming that he was ready to accompany his master to prison and to death. An affecting prelude to his further fall, soon became visible in Gethsemane. He *slept* amidst the sorrows of his master ; evincing also a sad insensibility of the warning he had received ; and instead of acting in meek dependence, he drew forth his carnal weapon in the conflict, assailing the soldier in a manner and spirit highly inconsistent with the circumstances and awful occasion. Matt. xxvi. 33. Luke xxii. 31. John xviii. 10. Matt. xxvi. 5, 6. In what immediately followed, we behold him in circumstances equally disgraceful to him as a believer. He feared the impending storm, and fled away, forsaking his master in the moment of extremity. Yet his spirit was uneasy, and filled with solicitude to see the end of the assault : he, therefore, having retreated from observation, followed at a distance, hoping he should not be recognized as Jesus' friend. At length he became emboldened to expect he might escape the attention of the surrounding multitudes ; and ventured into the servant's hall, where he associated with them, and sat down to warm himself by the fire. In this situation he was charged by a maid servant with being one of Christ's disciples, which he positively denied ; endeavouring however to withdraw from his conspicuous situation. Having advanced to the porch, he was there again accused by a woman : but Peter with an oath declared that he was entirely unacquainted with the man. By this solemn asseveration he seems to have concluded he must have satisfied the company ; and he purposed to remain where he was ; when about an hour afterwards, a third accuser drew near to him, and appealed to him if he had not on that very night seen him in the garden with Jesus. Peter's mind was now thrown into the utmost terror and

consternation ; and he began with oaths and curses to swear he knew not the man. Jesus had forewarned him of this offence, had also given him a kind of memorial of this warning, by telling him the cock would not crow twice before he had thrice denied him. Peter had been inattentive to these tokens ; but at the moment when he last uttered his blasphemous denial, Jesus was passing through the judgment hall, surrounded by his violent foes : and turning an expressive and invincible look on Peter as he passed him, the offender's heart was smitten with anguish ; and departing from the scene of misery and sin, he sought a solitary place, and there wept bitterly. Luke xxii. 61. In the events that followed, Peter is not again mentioned until after the affecting scenes which accomplished Christ's sufferings. But in the wonderful resurrection of the Lord, we find him forward in affectionate feelings, remembered with compassion by Christ, who on his message of love to the disciples, particularly named this sorrowing offender, hereby encouraging him to hope for entire reconciliation. He evinced also great fervour and emotion, running to the tomb, see John xx. 3—7 ; and although filled with doubts, and much ignorance respecting the resurrection, ready joyfully to listen to the assuring testimony. Luke xxiv. 12, 34. It appears that some gracious visit from Christ was granted to Peter, by which his faith was confirmed. And as recorded John xxi, he was particularly addressed by Jesus, in a gracious form, which, whilst it brought his transgression to remembrance, assured him of pardon, and renewed his commission as a labourer. On this occasion, Peter's natural disposition was betrayed ; first in the fervency of his feelings, which caused him to cast himself into the sea, that he might swim to the shore and greet his master ; and next, in that vain curiosity, which, even at the

instant when he had heard of his own future trials, led off his mind to inquire into the lot of another, a want of due reflection which Jesus reproved.

We are carried further in our view of this Apostle's history than what belonged to his personal association with Christ on the earth, and have some interesting records in the Acts of the Apostles, and by his own Epistles, opening out his course and experience after the ascension of our Lord. According to the directions received from the Lord, the disciples returned from Mount Olivet and tarried in Jerusalem, waiting for the descent of the promised Holy Ghost. There they attended public worship, and held private meetings. In one of the latter, Peter's mind being filled with holy reflection, he stood up in the assembly, and proposed that one should be chosen from the company who might fill the apostolic office with them in the place of Judas, who had fallen by transgression. The proposal was accepted, and the lot given, with solemn prayer and appeals to the Lord as the disposer of all things. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples, Peter was privileged to address the concourse of people assembled in Jerusalem in the observance of that feast, and was honoured by opening the gospel kingdom, according to the Lord's promise to him, three thousand of the Jews being on that day converted to the faith of Christ. Shortly after a miracle was performed by the Apostle on a cripple, who lay at the gate of the temple; which gave occasion for the bold and energetic testimony of Jesus from the lips of Peter, in consequence of which a spirit of persecution burned against the Apostles, and Peter and John were apprehended and put in prison; and on the morrow being brought before the rulers, &c. they were interrogated as to their conduct. Peter, being filled with the Holy Ghost,

addressed the assembly, testifying that it was by the name of that same Jesus whom they had crucified, and who was risen from the dead, that the impotent man had been made whole ; and that this in fact was the stone which the builders had rejected, and which was become the head of the corner : by whom alone salvation could be given. This boldness, and evidently supernatural eloquence, drew from the hearers a more particular attention ; and they perceived and felt that they derived their powers from Jesus ; neither could they gainsay the witness, since the impotent man who had been healed stood with the Apostles. When therefore they had consulted among themselves, they resolved upon milder measures than they had at first contemplated. They then called the Apostles and gave them a charge to speak no more in the name of Jesus ; to which charge Peter boldly stated it was impossible for them to be obedient, having a higher command and responsibility. When released from this examination, they immediately resorted to their own company, lifting up their voices in united praise and prayer, and receiving a sensible answer from the Lord : for the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. Five thousand souls had been added to the church through Peter's address when he healed the cripple. Thus the church multiplied in the midst of persecution, and a spirit of unity prevailed through the body ; many casting in all their worldly substance to the Christian treasury ; and believers having all things common. See Acts, chapters i—iv.

The fifth chapter of the Acts introduces Peter once more engaged in the detection of hypocrisy, being filled by the Spirit, and enabled to charge upon Ananias and Sapphira the guilt of lying to

the Holy Ghost, having pretended to an act of liberality towards the church, which they had not honestly performed. To his awful word the Lord gave his tremendous witness, in the instant death of the two offenders. These events added greatly to the prosperity of the church, by imparting a holy awe to the minds of the disciples, and by deterring those who were not upright from entering into a profession of the gospel ; and the Holy Ghost continued to attend the preaching of the word with miraculous powers. Persecutions, however, multiplied in proportion. And we find Peter with his brethren again under arrest, but miraculously released by the angel of the Lord, who brought them forth from the prison, and bid them go and stand in the temple and speak to the people the words of life. These surprising occurrences in some degree intimidated the adversaries ; and Peter exhorted them to remember how he had said that they should obey God rather than man. But when he added to this a pointed accusation of those whom he addressed, as the murderers of him whom God had exalted as Prince and Saviour, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay the Apostles. The prudent counsel of Gamaliel, a Pharisee and doctor of the law, withheld them from these violent measures ; but they were not liberated without receiving many stripes, and charged also no more to speak in Jesus' name.

We now advance to the tenth chapter of the Acts, where Peter is sent to Cornelius, and is made instrumental to the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles. A previous vision was granted to the Apostle, designed to remove his national and religious prejudices, and to prepare him for the messengers who solicited his visit to Cesarea. Having arrived at the house of Cornelius, he rectified his mistaken conception of his person and

character ; bidding him to consider him as a man like himself, and to forbear from addressing divine honour to him. He next protested before them all his integrity as a Jew, and declared the ground on which he now transgressed the customs of his nation. But when Cornelius detailed what had taken place with himself, and the direction by which he had acted, a flood of heavenly light burst in upon the Apostle's mind, and he glorified God for his grace extended to Gentiles. During this expression of grateful praise, the Holy Ghost descended upon those who heard his word ; and Peter proceeded to administer the rite of baptism, calling to mind, as we find by his own words, chap. xi. 16. the testimony of Jesus respecting the Gentiles. Here he tarried, in compliance with the request of the company, many days ; but on his return to Jerusalem he was required to give an account to the brethren of his unprecedented conduct, to which he replied by a full statement of the circumstances already considered ; by which the minds of the brethren were satisfied and enlarged.

Persecutions again breaking out against the Christians, after some painful experience of the church, Peter was apprehended by Herod, and cast into prison with the intention of bringing him forth after the solemnities then celebrating, to public execution. His situation at this time was highly distressing to nature—bound to two soldiers, and carefully guarded by unwearied numbers, there appeared to be no possibility of his escape ; but he was the object of the divine guardianship, and his hour of departure was not yet come. Whilst sleeping in his prison, where he serenely composed himself, in faith committing the care of his body to the keeper of his soul, he was suddenly awoke by the angel of the Lord, who smote him on the side and bid him rise up quickly. Instantly the chains fell from his hands : and the

angel, commanding him to prepare for quitting the prison, bade him follow him. He conducted him in safety through the several wards, and passing through the iron gate of the city which opened of its own accord to let them advance on their way, they arrived at a street of the city, when the angel disappeared leaving Peter now fully assured of the truth of the transaction, for until this moment he wist not that it was true, but thought he saw a vision. His soul was now filled with glowing love and praise to his great deliverer; and after a little reflection, he determined upon going first to the house of Mary, a disciple, where many were gathered together in prayer on his behalf. The gladness and surprise occasioned by his unexpected appearance amongst them was unfeigned; but it was not deemed safe for him to remain in their company; therefore, after sending a consolatory message to James, he departed for a season into some place of greater privacy, Acts xii. Soon after this persecution Herod died, and Peter had no more to apprehend from the malice of this enemy. We soon read of his resumed public labours in chap. xv. engaged in the interesting discussion which took place respecting Gentile liberty—attending the general conference, and delivering his opinion; especially seeking to establish his arguments by the example of the Spirit's descent in the matter of Cornelius; from which he states that it is manifest the Gentiles were received, and that it was inconsistent to put a yoke upon them in respect of the ceremonial law, which they themselves had found burdensome, and from which in fact the gospel had delivered them; and he gives it as his opinion that in so doing they were tempting God. He was heard with attention; but his voice was not conclusive with the assembly. Then Paul stood up and pleaded the cause of liberty. And at length James standing up, and

presenting the whole of the arguments which had been advanced, in a clear and powerful speech, the interesting question was concluded by determining in favour of liberty to the Gentiles. This determination was to be made known to the churches interested in the debate ; and Paul, Silas, and Barnabas, were commissioned to bear the tidings to Antioch. During the time of their sojourning there, Peter on some unknown occasion visited them : and at the first, consistently with the sentiments he had expressed in the conference, associated freely with the Gentile converts ; but when certain brethren from James came to them, he withdrew from the Gentiles, as if ashamed of their fellowship, or not persuaded of their liberty. For this error, Paul declares, in writing to the Galatians, he withstood him to the face, severely remonstrating against his sinful and dangerous conduct, which was calculated to subvert many of the chief principles of the gospel salvation, Gal. ii. 11. He seems to have received the rebuke in meekness and submission.

Two epistles were written by Peter, addressed to the scattered strangers, and containing many important truths respecting doctrine and experience. They appear to have been written a short time before his death ; and contain some sentiments having a reference to his own individual affections, which assist us in determining the state of mind in which he waited for his call to the heavenly rest. We have no regular scriptural account of this event ; but the best authenticated record is, that he suffered in Rome, under Nero, after being imprisoned nine months ; and that, by his own request, he was crucified with his head downwards. Thus he finished his testimony of Jesus, and found the fulfilment of that prediction of Christ, by which he had been prepared to expect conformity to his Master in the last eventful scene.

We must now retrace the steps of Peter, in order to select such passages of his life for more particular attention, as present us with his character in a prominent light.

The opening traits of Peter's disposition are very interesting, as seen in the beginning of his discipleship. He was most probably prepared, by John's ministry, to listen to what further information might be gathered respecting Jesus ; and he yielded a teachable heart to the wishes of his brethren, being willing to investigate truth, and to follow the most likely method of obtaining information. That his soul was under the Holy Spirit's preparation cannot be questioned ; but Peter was not sensible of this at the time when he first accompanied Andrew into the presence of our Lord. A secret invisible power, more mighty than the persuasions of his brother, won upon his soul, and disposed him to turn his feet into the path which conducted to this heavenly Teacher. It appears very conspicuously, from the succeeding history, that Jesus had gained a mighty power in his heart ; for although he continued his occupation, his thoughts were perpetually turning upon the sacred stranger, and many times he left his avocation, to go and listen to his word ; and at all times his property, his vessel, his house, were open for the use and accommodation of the Lord. These were the dawnings of his after devotion, and shew us his heart under saving and powerful operations. On the memorable occasion when these affections assumed a more regular form, he passed through an agitating experience belonging to the Spirit's convictions. He had a faith in the power of the Lord, but it was mixed with much uncertainty : his reverence or love constrained him to an act of obedience, the command of Jesus' lips being sufficient for him ; nevertheless he did not expect

the result which an unmixed faith and clearer views would have done, and his whole soul was overpowered by surprise mixed with alarm, when he realized the greatness of that person before whom he stood. His own sinfulness now rushed upon his recollection; he seemed in his own sight ready to perish, and unmeet to look upon the Lord, and with extreme agitation he uttered his fears, by intreating that the Lord would depart from him. This was no *distaste* of the Saviour's presence,—love and estimation of him were fervent as before; but it was the feeling of deep humiliation, expressed in confession of sin, prostration at Jesus' knees, reverential awe of Christ's greatness, and was probably the first deep conviction experienced by Peter. That it was genuine and loving is evinced in the result; for it was attended, as we have seen, by a relinquishment of earth, and of all secular concerns, for a decided adherence to the steps of Christ. In this adherence it was his delight to dwell upon the sacred lessons he heard, and with affectionate sincerity to abide where Jesus might abide. *Association* was the joy of his now surrendered heart. Through even the infirmities of Peter, we discover this natural fervour sanctified to entire love of Christ, and that his enjoyments were all now derived from fellowship with his Master. These were feelings which he had in common with the rest of the disciples; but his natural vehemence many times burst forth, causing the fire which lived in his bosom, in some instances, to exhibit a more visible and glowing character. Thus we find them *all* unwilling to leave the Lord alone on the shore, and *constrained* to get into the ship; but Peter only expressing that bounding delight of heart at the sound of his voice, which not only hushed his fears, but prompted him to desire to go to him on the water. It is true this desire might arise from other feelings

than those of simple love,—ambition, adventurous passion, or presumption, might dictate similar wishes ; but Jesus did not disapprove either the desire or request, we therefore conclude it was not in itself wrong, or from a corrupt motive : on the contrary, it was a strong act of faith in Christ's power, and the adventuring of life itself upon his faithful protecting grace. We will allow that there might be a mixture of infirmity in Peter's spirit, belonging to a naturally daring character and impatience of spirit. And we also certainly discover that great as his faith was, it had no perfection, it was bounded in its extent, and depressed by the rising winds, yet even here it obtained a victory, for it uttered the confident the importunate cry, and still hung upon the willingness and power of the Lord. It appears that Peter felt great increase of confidence in the Lord, after this wonderful scene, and was prepared to submit his own understanding to the Lord's divine instructions, when others were offended ; see John vi. He confessed Christ's person, office, and power, with a settled persuasion that he only had the gift of eternal life to bestow ; and that no other refuge could avail for miserable man ; evidently feeling, at the time when he made this confession, the steadfast intention of cleaving unto him. From the speedy repetition of this confession which we hear from Peter, it is evident that his mind and soul were abidingly and strongly impressed with a sense of the dignity of Christ's person. The *extent* of his own confession he appears not to have understood ; for as yet he was in ignorance of some of the particulars belonging to the work and kingdom of Jesus ; but he believed him to be the Messiah, that Christ, the Eternal Son, and that the promises, whatever they might signify, were accomplished in him. That great darkness, and much natural feeling, prevailed in him, is mani-

fested in that time of peculiar honour, when the Lord acknowledged and rewarded his confession. His soul was averse to the idea of suffering—especially of suffering to be endured by his Master: he did not comprehend the necessity for Messiah's rejection, shame, and death; herein he was yet earthly in his affections, and had a *false* tenderness, which proved a snare to his soul, and a favourable ground on which Satan tempted and deceived him. He therefore rashly and presumptuously attempted to dissuade the Lord from this course, and would have suggested a path to dominion more pleasurable to flesh. In the midst of that distinction, which, on another occasion, the Lord bestowed upon Peter, we perceive the sad evidence of infirmity. When on the mount of Transfiguration, instead of being alert and prepared for the privilege of this intimate communion with the Lord, he was *heavy with sleep*; when awakened to see the glory, he was *sore afraid*; when cheered by gracious assurances, he was disposed to *rest* in what he beheld; and altogether evinced a great degree of ignorance, and a lamentable mixture of selfishness, forgetting his friends whom he had left below, and losing sight of that zeal which should have prompted him to seek the benefit and joy of others, by the testimony of the glory of the Lord. These infirmities, however, although culpable, were not the evils of an allowed disinclination to the things which are spiritual; they were the effects of a nature miserably fallen and blinded. But the love of Peter's heart was not defective as to integrity; and his prejudices were gradually cleared away. He manifested also some energy and strength of mind, especially considering his communicative temper, in keeping the secret committed to him, which was faithfully retained, until liberty was given, after the completion of Christ's work on earth, to proclaim what had been seen and heard.

One of the most prominent features in the *character of Peter, is that of teachable desire for information.* His natural disposition had much in it of curiosity and observation ; he was also communicative, and forward to speak ; but he used these propensities sometimes in a very gracious spirit, asking for instruction in mysteries, in practical duties, and obediently following the counsel given. He seems to have felt a more than usual freedom of confidential affection towards Christ, so that his open heart was promptly discovered without attempting any disguise ; and he expected the same ready expression of love on his master's part. Neither was he ever disappointed. He once received a check, when his questions respecting the lot of John betrayed *vain* curiosity ; but on all other occasions, his inquiries were graciously and wisely satisfied.

There is a mixture in Peter's character which would surprise us, were we not acquainted with the strange contrarieties which abound in every sinner's heart ; but the knowledge of ourselves will help us to understand how these contradictory feelings could subsist in one man. How remarkably we discover this contradiction in the self-complacency, and dis-esteem of self, which are evinced in this man ; at one time undoubtedly putting an inordinate and blameable value upon the sacrifices he had made for the Lord : at another declaring himself too mean and vile for Christ to debase himself to wash his feet. How equally excessive also are his feelings when the error of his judgment was rectified ! and how rash and ignorant of himself, notwithstanding his past experience, and his master's tender caution. Alas ! infirmity was affectingly the most conspicuous, as the gathering clouds grow darker over the Saviour's head : and although Peter retained his love, still cast in his lot with Jesus, accompanied him to the garden,

and owned him in the first onset of the foe, we discover how awfully his adherence to the hope of a kingdom that was only to be glorious, had depressed the energies of his faith, so that he could not penetrate through these intermediate shades, nor realize the *spiritual* dignities of his Lord under this affecting veil. Ardent, loving, bold, and daring, as his natural character evidently was, yet he was capable of acting as one devoid of sympathy, as one who had changed his love, as a coward trembling before imagined danger, and as a false-hearted pretender, who, in the face of the foe could blaspheme and disown his friend. It is exceedingly affecting to a heart that is able to enter experimentally into the history of these last scenes of Peter's association with his master, to find so melancholy a shade upon a friendship, and discipleship, which began and was so long maintained in faithful intimacy and obedience; and it is more affecting, when we take into consideration the touching manner in which Jesus as a friend had unfolded to Peter the danger to which he would be exposed, rebuked his self-confidence, and tenderly awoke him from his sleep in Gethsemane. That Peter's heart still lingered round his beloved Lord was evident, otherwise he had never approached the judgment hall; but this love was but like an expiring ember, chilled and feeble, through the power of his fears and corruptions; And we must needs feel some shock to our own hearts, when we behold him consulting for his own ease and comfort, by sitting down to warm himself by the fire, amidst the murderers of his master, at the very moment when that sacred and beloved object was encountering immediately near him insults and scorn. Unhappy Peter! How wert thou fallen! Where at that instant was thy boasted love and truth? Fatal had been the fall, could Jesus have proved equally untrue; and

happy for this miserable man was that purpose, and strength of love, which caused Jesus in the midst of his own sorrows to think upon the peril of this his chosen disciple : and blessed that love in his heart which sent forth the convicting, subduing look, by which the rock was smitten, and Peter was made a penitent indeed. Little perhaps can we understand the extent of anguish which gave birth to the bitter tears he shed ; or enter into that after conflicting experience, which no doubt he would endure, but which we may in some measure understand, from the careful attention which the Saviour paid to the wound in his heart, in sending him messages that should re-assure his soul. We may rejoice in again beholding him with his recovered fervour and tender devotion, as displayed in the closing scene previously to our Lord's ascent to glory ; yet even here be sorry to discern that the leaven of his native disposition still worked in him, leading him into temptation, and exposing him to reproof. John xxi. 21, 22.

From the period of Christ's departure from this world, the character of Peter began to assume a more established and determined expression of sanctified intrepidity. In all those scenes through which we traced him, when selecting the passages in the Acts which refer to his history, we discover a great advance of stability, and a blessed deliverance from that fear of man, which had so fatally ensnared him. In the face of all manner of peril threatened and endured, he maintained his holy courage immoveably. The omnipotent power of the Holy Ghost, perfecting his strength in weakness, was conspicuous and splendid ; and his ministry was discharged with a firmness, a personal application of the word, a persistence combined with discrimination, judgment, and tenderness, all exhibiting the one object of faith, now seen by his

anointed eye in cloudless majesty and glory, and proclaimed by his inspired lip, in all the comprehensive covenant. Jesus was now his perpetual theme, as Lord, and Priest, and Sacrifice, and Head, and Saviour, and all in all to his redeemed. And in this redemption he was now enabled to perceive, how the covenant embraced the Gentile with the Jew, and magnified the Messiah in a plenteous redemption. Notwithstanding the glorious advance in the heavenly life, and in the apostolical gifts of the Spirit, Peter closed not his career without a further mark of the flesh, which warreth against the Spirit; for alas! in the circumstances already referred to respecting gentile converts, the fear of man brought him again into a snare, and exposed him to severe rebuke from Paul: but here it appears that meekness prevailed, and that he was speedily recovered from the error.

There is an exceeding beauty visible in the course of Peter, when examined under the seasons of peculiar trial. How lovely is that spirit of devotion, which rendered communion with the saints his continued delight! How excellent that holy submission, which received *stripes* as marks of divine honour, which, rising superior to shame and pain, lifted up the tribute of praise to God on this account, and of prayer for further boldness and utterance! How estimable his conscientious attention to what he esteemed his duty as a Hebrew, and his readiness to sacrifice his prejudices, glorifying God that gentiles were saved! How blessed that state of composure, which enabled him to sleep serenely between his two keepers, by whom he expected in a few hours to be led out to death! How admirable that laborious devotion to the interests of the gospel, which urged him incessantly to seek sinners, to preach the word, to persuade, exhort, rebuke, entreat! And how interesting the

little glimpse he affords us of his own experience just on the eve of his entering upon the final kingdom ! The whole style of his Epistles indeed demonstrates the ripened soul, meet and ready for the blissful exchange of earthly toil for heavenly rest. They breathe the spirit of sympathetic zeal for the christian disciples, expressed in enlarged consoling declarations of the glorious covenant in Christ, whereof he testifies in the great doctrines of election, sanctification, regeneration, justification, perseverance, final glory, present purification through sanctified afflictions, all known by himself experimentally, and brought into his fervent exhortation to fellow saints and sufferers, as the high motives to joy and steadfastness in the cross ; in these exhortations, combining parental tenderness, yearning over his children in the faith, and desiring that Jesus should be glorified in their consistency and beauty, ever directing the believer to keep the Saviour in view, to labour for holiness, to stand ready for suffering, and to look for the second advent wherein they, and their Master, and Lord, would be glorified. In the spirit of an Apostle, also, he assumes the authoritative style, speaks as an elder, a witness, and as one who had a solemn right to address both the sheep and the keepers of the flock. The second Epistle seems to present this precious saint, as in an increased state of humility and spirituality ; he opens it with *Simon* Peter, remembering his own original, probably, and the *grace* which had changed his name and nature. He speaks of his firm intention to discharge his responsibilities as long as life shall be continued unto him, and to seek through his written testimony to be a witness after his own departure ; see 2nd Epistle i. 1, 12—21. He speaks of putting off his earthly tabernacle, with a pure and holy desire after the eternal rest, and as a traveller going home. He

makes an honorable and affectionate mention of his reprover, chap. iii. 15. and leaves a sweet savour of the grace which had been magnified in him, and by which he was, according to his prayer for others, "strengthened, stablished, settled!"

The review of this interesting character will no doubt be profitable to the believer's mind and soul. Let us give the glory of those excellencies, which we discover, to that eternal Lord, from whom they manifestly flowed. Let us also observe the infirmities, that we may not overrate the character, or fall into the error of exalting Peter in any degree of superstitious reverence. We trace nothing of supremacy in the Scripture account of Peter. In conference he had no deciding voice. Paul also declares, he added nothing in this respect to him. He was not infallible in his conduct in the churches; but called for open rebuke, as one endangering the cause by an act of dissimulation. And although he is greatly honoured as a vessel of mercy, and had one distinction bestowed upon him in the first opening of the gospel dispensation after the descent of the Holy Ghost, he was by no means elevated into a superior rank in the churches above the other Apostles, nor ever pretended to an assumption of such authority.

The *whole* of this history is instructive; but, for our present use of the example, we must rest more particularly on those parts which will bear upon our own pilgrimage as Christians. It is a peculiar blessing, to have a mind that is teachable, and ready to rise above the power of prejudice; without this we are in danger of adhering to principles, and practices, which may become our ruin, or may induce many evils and losses, that a more enlarged and humble spirit would escape. We have innumerable examples of the wretched effects which follow bigotry; and these should be warnings to

us, keeping us back from the perilous pit. It is right that we should *investigate* before we condemn or approve; and especially in things which are spiritual, we have particular reason to be upon our guard, because this subject affords a strong hold of more strength and determination than any other wherein prejudice may hide itself. We ought in these things to imitate the example of Peter; be willing to accept a brother's invitation to the examination of truth, and keep the heart open to receive such impressions as may appear agreeable to the testimony of the Scripture voice. In this path we shall frequently meet with unexpected blessings, find the Messiah, and receive illumination in points of doctrine and practice, wherein possibly we have been comparatively dark. Whether therefore we be amongst such as are wholly ignorant of truth, or of such as possess partial views of it, it is good to be exercised in a spirit of teachableness and inquiry, that so our souls may not be robbed of those precious spiritual discoveries which are to enrich them through all eternity.

Saving approaches to Christ, such as belong to the Spirit's drawings of the soul, will have effects answerable to those which appear in Peter. There is in fact a change of nature, and of name, attendant upon Jesus' effectual call, to which, if we are earnestly seeking our own assurance in Christ, we should direct our inquiry. Instead of being now designated stranger, alien, sinner, foe, the accepted soul receives the appellation of associate, reconciled one, ~~saint~~, friend; and along with these distinctions a new principle, through which they shall be consistently maintained. The divine presence is in covenant with such an one, and an indwelling God will impart such affections and strength, as will render the profession of the faith now embraced firm as a rock, never to be removed away from Christ. notwithstanding the various assaults and

shocks to which it may be exposed. The Lord is pleased to give such increasing views of himself, connected with the principle of grace that he has implanted in the heart, as tends to the increase of all those several affections by which he is loved and glorified; and every advancing day of fellowship with him will be followed by advances of reverence, devotion, and simplicity. None can so live with Jesus in the Spirit, without obtaining such blessed establishments; for acquaintance with him is *transforming*, through the power of the Holy Ghost; and this transforming is a work all impregnated with love, so that we are increasingly one with him to whom we are conformed. How fully is this displayed in true converts, with whom it is evident that Jesus has attractions more and more realized and owned. Their delight in him, therefore, does not spring out of *novelty*, but is a deep-seated and growing holy enjoyment. Communion with him will be refreshing, so that we would spend our days in this sweet repast; yet love will prompt to active obedience, and mingle its sweets in the common avocations of life, or in the special duties of spiritual ministrations. It is by this principle that we are enabled, like Peter, to follow our calling, whatever it may be, with Jesus in the heart; and should he leave us in our more private and laborious station in this world, or call us out to more public and spiritual consecration of our talents, we shall with this blessed devotional mind always find an unspeakable enjoyment in *duty*—it is the obedience of *love*. We may gather important instruction from the circumstances of Peter, in the course of his calling, as the disciple and witness for Christ. There are many incidents in his life, peculiarly adapted to show forth the condition, privileges, and experience of the saints in every age; and if we have been brought to Christ, and have truly taken up the cross, we may

very profitably dwell on them as instructive to ourselves.

It will of course follow, that, as real disciples of a crucified and rejected Saviour, we shall in our *condition* be made like unto him whom we follow. Let us never forget that true discipleship is an *association* with the Lord. This will bring upon us the pains and griefs which nature suffers, when under present persecution and exposure, and trials of various descriptions, which will come upon us in this evil world, causing us sometimes to sigh, and in some parts of our course perhaps sometimes also to fear. We are fully aware that the world and Satan are opposed to the spirituality of the gospel; so that if love constrains us to be with Jesus in Gethsemane, or would prompt us to follow him to Calvary, we know that in these steps the adversary may come violently upon us. We may also be met in our course of labour with opposers, blasphemers, and malicious haters of Christ, to whom our personal addresses may be offensive, and whose rage at being accused as murderers of the Messiah, or at being called to make a confession of Jesus crucified and risen, may be desperate, moving them to oppress, to imprison, to stripe, and to threaten us with death. And it may please the Lord now, as in time past, to let his children experience the breaking of these waves upon them. These outward trials are not all. Perhaps there may be painful occurrences in the bosom of the church—disorders calling for severe measures—or doubts existing in the minds of brethren, respecting the paths which in particular cases we may have pursued; calling for explanation, forbearance, and a humble readiness to be called to an account. Or, which is the worst of all the evils, there may be in us some constitutional evil, which struggles, or secretly works, for dominion; some *hastiness*, forwardness, imprudence, self-confidence. or fear

of man, which requiring perpetual mortification, *puts us upon a life of crucifixion; or, which, not being sufficiently under discipline, leads us into temptation.* All these are what belong to the *condition of saints*, in which they may trace a correspondence between their case, and that of Peter.

The *privileges* of such, however, are also in accordance with what was granted to this disciple. And whatever may be our difficulty, we may rejoice in the doctrinal truths which he proclaims, "*Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.*" We have to guard against rushing into dangers, or venturing uncalled into scenes of temptation. We have no right to court opposition, or invite an assault, by entering into perilous undertakings, or into unhallowed society: but if our evident duty lays through a stormy sea, or in perilous scenes, we may thus enter with confidence, that the Lord would not have directed our way in such dangers without having a purpose to keep us there. We have considered, in our view of miracles, how the Lord is with his people in storms and in contrary winds, manifesting his power to still the tempest and bring them safely to the shore. Here, in Peter's history, we may discover how he also enables his people to tread with him on the dangerous deep, and can and will make the most threatening circumstances occasions for shewing forth their faith and his power. If it be by his voice, and in going forth to him, that we adventure to stand upon the watery wave of trial, we have nothing to fear. Because he lives, we shall live also; because he overcame, we also shall overcome; and wherever Jesus stood, we may stand, as upheld and strengthened by his omnipotent power. Amidst the roarings of the ungodly, who wage war against Christ in his members, and whose threatenings are sometimes executed in fierceness and power, we still have the sure defence

of the Everlasting One : and by the promise, we are provided with the descent of the Holy Ghost in increasing plenitude, who shall strengthen and establish us unto every trial we meet. It is our privilege, in consequence, to speak with boldness, to testify of the divine counsels, without apprehending the power of the creature, and to repose upon the faithfulness of that blessed Lord, who will not leave us in peril. Should he be pleased by this means to call away the soul, we, as believers, may trust him to bear it to the realms of glory, and to sanctify to us the method through which this purpose is accomplished. And we have lasting memorials to his praise, of that abundant mercy which supplies every Christian sufferer with strength for the day. It is our part to look *out* of self into him. It is not by natural fortitude, courage, or hardihood, that his people triumph ; theirs is the supernatural energy given in their new life out of the living Head : and assuredly, as he gives power for the least, so he will for the greatest trial which may befall us. We behold this exemplified in the disciple sleeping between the two soldiers ; we shall experience the same present Lord in our own afflictions, for “ so he giveth his beloved sleep ! ” These recollections are very needful and salutary, as we pass through this uncertain world ; for we are like Peter, naturally indisposed to suffering, and the tempter may endeavour to enter upon our trembling hearts through this medium. So long as we are calculating upon *native* strength, or our own faithfulness, we are likely to be misled either into self-confidence or despondency ; but when we cast our care upon the Lord, believing that he careth for us, we obtain composure, and we grow in humility. This simplicity will also help us to meet the more domestic or bosom trials which arise ; for if we are living in satisfaction with the Lord’s testimony of our

integrity, we shall not be offended when brethren suspect us ; we shall be willing to have our conduct and principles investigated, and to give an account of our proceedings, such as may be satisfactory to their minds. And in the conflict we endure from the old man that is in us, surely we shall admit that there is no consideration can give us peace excepting that the Lord is true ; and even in the deepest straits of trial we shall be ready to exclaim, “ To whom shall we go ? ” Where else shall we find life, help, or pardon, but only in him who has the words of eternal life !

In the experience of our souls we have already received a visitation like that to Peter in the prison, unless we are destitute of the Spirit's life ; for in our native state, we lie in the captivity of sin and Satan, bound by our own corruptions, and, alas ! asleep and insensible to the dangers around us, in a *false* peace, in a *fatal* security, whilst the sentence of eternal death is upon us ! It is the office of our redeeming Lord to rescue such prisoners, and to bring them forth to the day of holy liberty. In fulfilment of this grace, he enters the regions of Satan's empire, and in sovereign invincible love and power effects the liberation of the captive. Chains fall off, prison-doors and bolts are thrown open, satanic force is restrained, the sleep of death is shaken off, and the favoured soul led into the paths which conduct to fellowship in the city of the Heavenly Zion. On many occasions this visitation is so surprising, that the subject of it scarcely believes that what he sees and feels is true ; the life and the liberty seem too wonderful and too blissful to be really appropriated ; and when indeed a little advancing experience gives the confidence of faith, bursts of praise and wondering love rise to the great Deliverer, and he is ready to exclaim, “ Now know I that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me ! ” How

precious are the pleasures which now flow in upon the heart, descending from the right hand of God, coming forth in the stream of love that issues from Jehovah in covenant! And how dear those delights which are found in the mount, or in the garden, or in the field of conflict, with the assurance of divine favour for an everlasting portion! These are the sweets prepared for the experience of the faithful, notwithstanding they dwell in a world of sin and pain.

Let us meditate upon the course of Peter, as spiritually elucidating the Spirit's dealings with our own souls, and as speaking in loudest terms of instruction and caution to us in our pilgrimage. We should seek high fellowship with Jesus in all the variety of the experience of a true disciple. When with him on the mount of Tabor, be alert and ardent to contemplate the glory of his revealed countenance, and to drink in the witness that is given of his greatness. Yet beware of *resting* in any present privileges. We may in some senses say, "It is good to be here," but we must never propose to build a tabernacle of repose in the privilege, so as to interfere with our labour and descent into the valley. Ere long, Jesus will take us where it is indeed good to be, and where we shall abide for ever to behold his glory; in the mean time, we must be ready to meet the duties awaiting us, using the *cordials* that we receive as stimulating helps in the way of a pilgrim. When with our Beloved in the garden of suffering, we must be equally alive to the exercise of faith and fellowship, ready to watch with him, ready to sympathise with his suffering members, now in the body, and exposed in the world. We must carefully guard against any thing which borders on self-dependence, on presumption, or negligence of the warnings received in the scriptures. To each of us it may be said, "Satan hath desired to

have thee:" and in each of us there is likewise a coward flesh and corrupt inclinations, continually ready to betray us into his power. And although we are in the bosom of him, who has said of all his blood-bought ones, "I have prayed for thee," unless we are vigilant, we shall many times be overtaken and overcome by temptations that cause us bitter anguish and humiliation. The counsel of our Lord should therefore be treasured up in our recollection, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." His words of truth should be with us continually, "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." And when we have before us such affecting examples of the instability of the heart, and the subtlety of sin, we should learn to walk humbly with our God; so that, whilst honestly and fervently appealing to Jesus, with, "Thou knowest that I love thee," we may in lowliness of spirit depend upon him for maintaining that love, and its genuine fruits of steadfastness. In our labours of love for Jesus' name, be not ashamed of confessing, either as to spiritual or temporal riches, "Silver and gold have I none." Our poverty is no disgrace, if it be the Lord's appointment; and our comparatively poor ability, in the attainments of human learning, need not be a hindrance to the faithful zeal and affection that prompts the heart to say to fellow-sinners, "Such as I have give I thee." It is in this simplicity that the Lord frequently glorifies his blessed name, by shewing how much he can effect by feeble means. And as it respects the riches of temporal good things, perhaps we may say, that in many instances they rather obscure the evidence of the work of grace in such as are benefited, rendering it sometimes questionable whether the profession is really one of faith in Christ, or of dependence on the creature. Therefore, although it is a joy to be able to administer help to the poor by relieving their tem-

poral distresses, let us not inordinately covet the power; nor ever hold back what we can give of spiritual treasure, because we have not earthly things to bestow. And whatever an affectionate and grateful friend may desire to express towards us of estimation for our work's sake, let us, like Peter, be prompt to reject *inordinate* estimation, to discountenance praise bestowed on the creature, and to say to all such, "Stand up, I also am a man like thyself." Let Jesus be ever the theme on which we discourse—the object to whom we direct the faith of sinners—and the centre to which all our affections perpetually tend; that we may be found carefully watchful against making proselytes to *ourselves*. True zeal and faith will be earnestly engaged in realizing and presenting the Lord Jesus, as the anointed, powerful, merciful, crucified, risen Judge, and pardoning God; and whilst labouring to shew the sinner how the Saviour has been crucified *by him*, will point out the compassions which flow in the promises, and by which the Lord Jehovah has engaged to give the remission of iniquity.

O let us then seek to live in the Holy Ghost, growing in grace and experience, that our *regeneration* may be exhibited in *conversion*, as in the case of Peter; our hearts not only being the seat of the Spirit's operation, but our lives also presenting the manifest decision of a change that has affected the whole man. And as our Lord said to regenerate Peter, "when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren;" so let us use our more established spiritual existence in all its stages, for the furtherance of the joy and edification of the saints. In these paths we shall find what we profess to seek, an increase of relative usefulness, knowledge, and assurance; and shall be preparing for that approaching moment, when we shall triumphantly meet the last enemy. Neither are

we to be discouraged because to the last period we have to struggle. The old corruptions that are in us may yet be felt to stir within the heart, and may yet strive to make head against us ; but we must put forth the proportionable vigour of the new man ; and should we unhappily be defiled by any trespass, against which we ought to have been more vigilant, we must not sink into despondency, or drop our shield of faith, but resolutely appeal to the blood of the covenant, and humbly receive the rebuke due to our offence, although possibly it may be addressed to us by one younger in the way than ourselves. All these things serve to lay us in the dust, but they must not depress us below the life of faith. And they will tend to endear to us the recollection which never can be too familiar, “ I must shortly put off this tabernacle ! ” The remembrance of this will shed a sacred awe upon the soul, and fill it likewise with holy gladness, since in dropping this mortal tabernacle, we put off the load of sin and every burden, rising in blissful liberty to the bosom of our Lord.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY and most gracious Lord, mercifully write upon our hearts those important truths which are conveyed to us through Thy holy word, and grant that in whatever form Thou art pleased to address us, we may be zealously and obediently attentive to Thy voice. Help us at this time to read the experience of thy servant, and to pass through his pilgrim steps with a desire to behold Thy glory reflected in the wonders attendant upon that way. And O may we look to ourselves, blessed Lord, and see in our own history the same grace, and power, combined to save and bless. We, O Lord, are utterly helpless, and have miserable hearts estranged from Thee, and disposed, even after Thou hast recovered them to Thyself, to be

wanderers, or cowards, or presumptuous; and in many sad and shameful ways to dishonour our profession, and grieve Thee. But our confidence is that Thou art a mighty and a never-failing help; from Thee every blessing is freely given, and mercies once imparted are never withdrawn. Herein the weary soul may find unspeakable rest, and all its sorrows and difficulties be hushed into peace. O Jesus, increase our faith, that we may become more firm, more cheerfully devoted, and ready to encounter all things for Thee; and so attract us to Thy blessed self, that we may never be removed, but may have fellowship with Thee for ever. We would leave all and follow Thee. We would believe that we find more than all in attaining unto Thee. We desire to derive from Thee strength and joy, and a portion for ever. O settle us in this faith, and make and keep us true to Thy cross. If it pleaseth Thee admit us, O Lord, to the Mount, where we may dwell in the vision of Thy glory; or take us with Thee to Gethsemane, where we may participate in Thy cross; only be with us, so as to sanctify the experience of our souls, and to bring us out of our pilgrimage finally enriched, by every vicissitude, or exercise we have known. O blessed Saviour, we earnestly beg of Thee to give us an energy of simple affiance in Thee; such as may prepare us for all future labours and persecutions which may be before us; delivering us from the temptation of looking to our own sufficiency, and bringing us to the momentary dependance of our souls upon Thee for peace and strength. And may it be our joy to think of shortly putting off this tabernacle; leaving it to Thee to determine how we shall be thus released from mortality; and using the remnant of our remaining days in the cause of that gospel of life, which is our only foundation and hope. Thus strengthen, stablish, and settle us for the glory of Thy blessed Name, O everlasting God and Saviour. Amen.

ANDREW.

Matt. iv. 18. John i. 35—41.

THE Scripture history of Andrew is extremely limited; he is mentioned in connection with his brother Peter in St. Matthew's gospel; but St. John gives us a more circumstantial account of his first introduction to Jesus. It appears that like Simon Peter and many others, he was an attendant upon the ministry of John Baptist; and under his instructions preparing for the reception of Messiah. It was, when in converse with John, that Jesus passed by, and that hearing from him a testimony to his being the Lamb of God, he with another disciple immediately followed after him, intent upon becoming more acquainted with his person and ministry. Receiving encouragement from Jesus, he entered with him into his habitation, where he seems to have had his mind convinced, and his affections attracted. These impressions moved him to seek his brother Simon, to whom he communicated his conviction, inducing him, as we have seen, to go with him to the Lord. After this he continued in his occupation as a fisherman, attending occasionally on Jesus, until he received his more regular call to discipleship, and was appointed also as one of the Apostles. We read of Andrew as associated with the little band in faithful fellowship, but not usually as a prominent speaker. He is mentioned in John vi. 8, 9, as observing upon the insufficient quantity of food for the multitude Jesus prepared to feed; and in John xii. 20—22, as consulted by Philip respecting the request of some Greeks, who desired to see Jesus; and as, in consequence, communicating their desire

to Jesus. These are the only occasions in which he is mentioned, excepting as one of the general family. He is reported by church history to have been regular, steady, and zealous in his labours, and is said to have suffered martyrdom by crucifixion, on a cross formed like the letter X, by order of the Proconsul Elgeas, to whom he preached the gospel, and who vented his rage and indignation, first in scourging, and then in crucifying this servant of God.

Short as is this history, it is replete with the blessed demonstrations of the heavenly principles of grace, and of the triumphs of the Holy Ghost in poor miserable man, proving to us how invincible are his operations, and how faithful in the support of the witnesses of the cross. Undoubtedly it was by the influence of the Holy Ghost that Andrew was led to the ministry of the Baptist, under whose testimony he became a convinced sinner; they who embraced the words of this forerunner of Messiah being professedly *penitents*, convicted, and mourning for sin. Under these contrite feelings he was ready to welcome the sound of a sacrifice, by whom iniquity should be pardoned; and mixing faith with what he heard from John, he followed after the Saviour with reverence and respect, desiring to attract his notice, and to be admitted into converse with him. This was as readily expressed by his lips, when interrogated by Jesus as to what he sought. The full persuasion which attended this interview was from the Spirit working in his soul; but it was on an evidently prepared subject, who had previously received from him the grace of teachableness and candour; so that he was able to discern in Christ the features prophetically proclaimed to man, and to verify in Jesus of Nazareth what the Spirit had revealed of the promised deliverer by the scripture page. There seems to have

been an affectionate confidence subsisting between him and his brother. Although apparently very different in natural disposition, they had the bond of relative affection strongly cast round their hearts, drawing them closely together ; and they had also a congeniality in experience of the Spirit's work in the soul, which rendered them allied by still nearer bonds. Andrew therefore instantly sought out his brother, that he might make him partaker of his new discovery, and share with him in the consolation which the revelation of the Saviour sheds into the breast. His heart, being now the captive of divine grace, was ready to accept the call which required his attendance upon the Lord's steps ; and without hesitation he forsook all and followed him, adhering in steadfastness of devotion to this sacred course in all situations. He evidently exhibited a self-denying firmness of character, not obtruding himself upon notice, but modestly and constantly prosecuting his way as a true disciple, embracing all occasions wherein to obtain increase of knowledge, ever maintaining association with the saints—delighting in prayer, and devoted to labour. In proof of this we find him always mentioned amongst those who were assembled for these purposes, and evidently possessed of the confidence of his brethren. His understanding, like that of the other disciples, was long encumbered by prejudice, and depressed by remaining shades of darkness. So great were the prejudices which prevailed respecting the extent and nature of Christ's kingdom, that we find a serious consultation taking place between Philip and Andrew, whether or not to sanction the idea of Greeks being admitted to conference with the Lord. But on this occasion he acted with integrity and humility. He did not presume to reject the request on his own authority, nor to decide according to his own rule of judgment as to which might be right in the Lord's sight, but

humbly laid the request before his Master. The close of Andrew's earthly course is altogether honourable to himself as a Christian. He suffered for righteousness' sake, and in a work of mercy to the immortal soul of a sinner, seeking to open to him the gates of eternal life by proclaiming the only Saviour ; and we may be fully persuaded, that in these trying circumstances, the Lord's upholding witness would be with him, filling his spirit with joy in the privilege of being thus conformed to his Master.

By this short sketch of the character of Andrew, we may gather what impresses us with the idea that he was a man of plainness, and simplicity of manners and spirit, of great integrity, of deep affections, and of honest purpose. The testimony respecting him is not at first perhaps so attractive as that which we find in the more prominent and detailed conduct and course of others ; but a close investigation gives us the delight of beholding in him the lovely features of genuine devotedness, and of genuine principle—dear to the Lord, sanctified to his glory, and spent in his name. And possibly when all secrets shall be unfolded, we shall discover a still greater lustre in this character, as belonging to those private experiences, and relative labours, by which he was distinguished as a servant and saint of God, but which are not recorded in the page of scripture.

Many of the practical lessons to be derived from this example have necessarily been considered in past pages ; for in some parts of the calling of this disciple, there is an exact agreement with the experience of others. We see, for example, how the great end of the ministry is to lay the axe to the root of the tree ; convincing the soul of sin, that the blessed Lamb of God may be the object of faith and desire. A mere conviction of guilt

and misery is not the design of the Spirit ; for this alone can do no more than lead to a bondage most cruel and degrading ; ending in a worse state of desperate transgression and unbelief, But in the means which the Lord has appointed for salvation, his own blessed presence is equally granted now, as it was displayed in the days of Andrew ; still he passes by, as it were, and is in the midst of the testimony of the divine will proclaimed by his ambassadors. These are his witnesses, and act as forerunners showing the avenging sentence that will be executed upon such as die in rebellion, and urging the sinner to flee from the wrath to come. These also point to the refuge, proclaiming that great appointment wherein the law is magnified and made honourable, and directing the convinced to behold the Lamb. It is by this means that the Lord operates to effect that union with himself which is the source of peace ; and through which we see in every instance, how knowledge and stability and rest are increased ; for he who truly seeketh Jesus, and would know where he dwells, so as to take up his abode with him, is assuredly under drawings of mercy and grace which will issue in peace here, and in glory hereafter. We therefore should bring our thoughts perpetually to the simple standard exhibited in the gospel, as the way through which the Lord leadeth his own, and bringeth them out of a state of carnal security into one of spiritual trouble ; and out of trouble, into that abiding consolation which flows from God in covenant. We are not, therefore, to shrink from the painful knowledge of ourselves ; if we desire substantial possessions, we must be content to pass to them through the tribulation occasioned by a sight of our own miseries, as guilty, helpless, and hell-deserving ; and in this way be brought to that state of self-emptiness and dependance, which is the introduction to a new existence, and which is

the means of maintaining that existence in vigour and simplicity. Where is the soul that can properly welcome the sounds of salvation in a bloody sacrifice, or that will patiently tread the road of inquiry after the healing mercies of Jesus, unless, in the first place, there has been a sense of the painfulness of the load that presses on a sin-burdened heart, and a persuasion that none but Jesus can deliver. And as the adhering longing love of the heart to Christ is requisite in order to a state of saving experience, how needful will it appear to the reflective mind, that those exercises should be endured which lead into this frame of feeling ! Let us but obtain clear views of the discipline by which sinners are brought to the appropriation of the cross, and we shall not be unwilling to encounter the tribulation, for the hope that is set before us, in the blessed Lamb.

Relative afflictions always form a conspicuous subject in the history of gospel dispensations ; we are taught to keep them under the reign of holy government, but we are shown that not to have them is to be worse than an infidel ; brotherly love is to continue and abound ; and so far from our relationship to Christ dissolving our bonds to those who are ours in nature, it tends to increase the purity, and strength, of the genuine affections of the heart. Of course we experience a greater degree of attachment in proportion to the demonstration of our congeniality in the things that are spiritual ; but in every case there will be from the true believer, a constant tribute of love and charity to the souls of others, and an unfeigned desire to see them in possession of those blessings which are now known to be essential and true. If this be our gracious state, a *brother's* soul will be dear to us, and we shall seek after him in whom we long to see an agreement with our own minds, endeavouring to persuade him to come to Jesus.

The style of our address will vary according to the state of him whom we seek to draw. If it be to one who is in ignorance of all religion, we shall speak of the necessity of coming to Messiah for life. If it be to one whose soul is already labouring under conviction of sin, we shall testify of having found him whose word has given peace to ourselves, and who is equally ready to impart pardon and rest to others. Let us not allow ourselves to remain ignorant of this important duty, or shrink from the discharge of it from any natural reasonings or cowardice. Love for our Lord, and love for our brother, will constrain us, if we are faithful to the Spirit's motions within us; and we shall in this energy overcome the obstacles which are in the way; and finding our brother, we shall certify to him that we have found the Messiah, and so strive to bring him to Jesus.

It may be, that in some instances, our views may be in measure confined and uncertain, as to whether we may with propriety introduce all kinds of sinners to the Lord. We are naturally ignorant, and prejudiced; and even when we have endured the deepest personal humiliation, we are still liable to a strange inconsistency of feeling and reasoning; instead of looking upon ourselves as a pattern to them who may come after, as having been saved amongst the chief of sinners, falling into the temptation of surmising that there may be exceptions to his grace in such and such particular instances of transgression in our fellow sinners. All this is an inconsistency of our nature and education; and will sometimes lead us into the same error, as was shown in the reasonings of Andrew. Happy is it for us, if, in the midst of this infirmity, we exercise the spirit of humility which was displayed by this man; and bringing our doubts and apprehensions to the mercy seat, make known the case of sinners with sympathy and compassion. Especially when

we perceive any thing like drawings, or inquiries of heart, after the Saviour, and hear from the lips of such as have been hitherto aliens and strangers, the language which seems to say, "we would see Jesus," there is great encouragement to believe that the Lord has himself directed the soul, and rendered it athirst for the waters of salvation. Here their energetic appeals should be made, for we are privileged to know the extent of the gospel purpose in clearer light than that which was possessed by Andrew; and we are persuaded, that in our glorified High Priest there is abundant redemption, reaching to every clime, and ready to embrace sinners of every description, in a finished and triumphant salvation. We therefore have no bound to the exercise of our charity, if we will only look to the fulness of the covenant; and may bring the case of poor souls, of every degree of misery, prostrate before the Saviour, pleading compassion in their behalf. Upon these particulars let us use the example of Andrew, as instructive and stimulating. Let us go beyond him in the measure of our discernment and confidence for sinners; and let us like him strive to glorify the Lord, by an advancing devotion, evinced in the steady and persevering love of the cross, even unto death. No doubt it is for these great practical purposes, that the Lord has been pleased to give us the record of those lives of the Saints, Apostles, and Martyrs, in whom he has been magnified; teaching us through the medium of example combined with precept; and showing us how full and sufficient are all those supplies which are laid up for believers in his glorious kingdom. In affianced, and holy rest of the soul, let us embrace the blest provision, tread the appointed way in simple trust, and keep the blissful end ever in our view.

PRAYER.

Most blessed and gracious Lord, O do 'Thou in Thy infinite mercy look upon us, imparting those spiritual energies which rise to meet Thee in Thy appointed way, and giving us those holy inward enjoyments which are the Christian's beloved and refreshing heritage. We are thankful to Thee, O Lord, for the tender mercy which Thou art pleased to display, in so rich a variety of Thy providence and grace, and bless Thee for affording us examples of Thy power to save and strengthen lost and helpless man. Without Thee, O Lord, we are incapable of attaining unto any consistency, or of maintaining any hope; but in, and by Thee, we shall have victory over all our adversaries, and may rejoice in the anticipation of everlasting blessedness. O revive our spirits, dearest Lord, by the vision of those things which are laid up at Thy right hand; draw aside the veil, and let us see the mansions which Thou hast prepared for them that love Thee, and O give us the anointing that may abide upon our minds and affections, so that our knowledge and our love may increase day by day. We desire to reach that standard to which Thou hast bid Thy people aspire; and to obtain those promises which are sealed and sure in Jesus. O grant us the gift that will invest us with all this blessed experience, even the presence of the indwelling Holy Ghost. We pray Thee to dissipate all those clouds which are ready to gather over us, even in our pilgrimage and discipleship; and not to suffer us to be prejudiced or darkened in our judgment of the things of the Lord. O pour the light of the eternal kingdom upon us, and enlarge our discernment, and establish our charity, making us labourers full of zeal, and dedicated to Thy

service. And since it is with Thee, O Lord, to determine, by what particular mode we shall serve Thee, and by what visitation we shall go home to Thee, O make us to cease from all needless anxiety upon this point; and help us, we beseech Thee, to be ready for whatever Thou mayest reveal respecting us; following Thee in patience, thankfulness, and peace. O in Thy great mercy, grant this to us, most blessed Lord, for the sake of Thy own blessed and everlasting Name. Amen.

JAMES THE ELDER, OR GREATER, AND JOHN HIS BROTHER

Matt. iv. 21, 22.

THESE two brothers are so closely connected in that part of their history which belongs to the time of Christ's ministry upon earth, that there seems an impropriety in dividing them in our view of character, until we come to that period in which their line of labour and experience began to vary. Both in their natural disposition, and their calling to service of the Saviour, they were exceedingly similar; and evidently, on most occasions of the family intercourse which subsisted whilst Christ was visibly amongst them, they evinced the same spirit and character. It appears that our Lord also considered them thus congenial, for he named them both Boanerges, or sons of thunder. James is styled in history James the Elder, or Greater, to distinguish him from the other James, who was the son of Alphaeus. The occupation of these brothers was that of fishing; they were partners with Andrew and Peter, but served with their father Zebedee; who seems to have been a man of some little property, having a ship and *hired servants*; see Mark i. 20. But when the gracious call of the Lord was addressed to them, they instantly relinquished all secular employments or gains, and left their Father with the hired servants, and embraced a life of discipleship. They were afterwards placed by Jesus amongst the Apostles; and along with Peter were admitted to some distinctions which the rest had not. They were with Christ on the Mount of Tabor, and beheld the transfiguration; they were with him when he raised the daughter of Jairus from

the dead ; and they were selected to advance with him into the interior of the garden of Gethsemane, that they might be witnesses of his sorrow and agony. We read of these two disciples agreeing with their mother to ask for the highest place of dignity in Christ's expected kingdom. They wished to sit one on the right hand and the other on the left, when Messiah should appear in his glory. Matt. xx. 21. Mark x. 35. Upon another occasion, they are heard to express a heated emotion of proud resentment, desiring to call for fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans who refused to receive them. See Luke ix. 54. They each, however, adhered faithfully to their Master, and laboured industriously in his cause unto death.

James appears to have been much older than his brother John, who is said to have been only sixteen when he first embraced discipleship. Of the former we do not read much, particularly after our Lord's death and resurrection. That he drew forth the rage of Herod is recorded in Acts xii. 2. for that persecuting tyrant gratified his own and the people's indignation against the faith, by putting him to death by the sword. We may therefore conclude, that he continued to be a leading and conspicuous light in the Christian church, according to the nature of his high appointment. He was the first of the *Apostles* who suffered martyrdom. And the history of those times informs us, that his conduct, on the occasion of his execution, was so holy and consistent, and his previous deportment and spirit had been so attractive to beholders, that powerful conviction of the truth of his principles, and of the faith of the gospel, found its way through his example into the soul of the man who led him to execution, so that he declared himself a believer in Jesus, and suffered martyrdom with the Apostle.

The circumstances of John's discipleship were

more peculiar; and his prolonged pilgrimage has furnished us with a more abounding history of wonders of grace, on the part of the Lord, extended to him. • He seems to have had an ingenuous readiness to receive the words of his Master with personal application. We find him, on the occasion when Christ was addressing the whole company upon the necessity of guarding against prejudice and self-preference, calling to mind an act, in which he supposed they must have transgressed this rule, and confessing to Jesus that they had prohibited a man from preaching, &c. in the name of Christ, because he did not associate with them. In the last scenes of our Lord upon earth, John becomes a very prominent character. He was sent with Peter to prepare the last supper. During the supper he leaned upon the bosom of the Lord; he communed with him in the confidence of intimate friendship, asking to be made acquainted with the secret which had caused so much agitation in the breasts of the disciples. In the garden he slept and was overcome, like his brethren, by the infirmity of the flesh; and, like the rest, he at first fled from the scene of danger; but afterwards, we behold him as one who had quickly returned to the confession of his Master's name, venturing amidst the crowd of murderers boldly up to the foot of the cross, steadfastly abiding there amidst all the afflictive scene, receiving the sacred guardianship of the afflicted Mary from the lips of his dying Lord, and tarrying close by the tree even when the multitudes were dispersed, so that he beheld the barbarous act of the soldier who ran the spear into the Saviour's dead body, and was made a witness of the fulfilment of prophecy in that circumstance. John xix. 32—37. From this scene of affliction, John seems at length to have retired to his own home, and there to have remained, in a state of mind anxious and sorrowful. But his affections were

speedily put into a new exercise by the information brought him by Mary, testifying that the body of Jesus which they had deposited in the sepulchre was certainly stolen, since they who had been at the tomb for the purpose of embalming it had found the place empty. John instantly, accompanied by Peter, ran to the sepulchre, and arriving there first looked in but entered not. Afterwards, however, he followed the example of his companion, and going into this sacred chamber in which the body of the Lord had been laid, he was satisfied that the report of the women was true, and that the Jews had conveyed away the body ; for as yet, he and the rest of the disciples did not, as they ought, credit or call to mind the certainty of the resurrection, of which their Lord had assured them. Ere the night closed, however, he was blest with the manifestation of this glorious truth ; and his anxious fears were exchanged for gladness in a risen Saviour. After this he was engaged, as John xxi. 3. in the party of disciples, who went out on their former occupation ; when, as we saw in the history of Christ, he was persuaded, that he, who stood on the shore and addressed them with such gracious words, was indeed their own Lord ; and this conviction he communicated to Peter. In the scene which succeeded, he received a testimony from Christ, which he knew how to interpret ; See John xxi. 22, 23. After the ascension of Christ, John continued in close association with the rest of the disciples ; but it is evident had a more especial intimacy with Peter, with whom he was continually connected in labour. See Acts, chapters iii. iv. 8. 14—17. Gal. ii. 9. On these occasions he evinced oneness of spirit with his friend, and an entire devotion to the work of the gospel. We have no further information in the Scriptures respecting John, than what we may gather from a consideration of his writings ; but from church history, we

have authenticated accounts which are important and interesting. From thence we learn, that he resided in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem until its approaching desolation, when he removed according to the direction which Christ had given his disciples. His chief place of abode after this period was Ephesus. But he was violently torn from his home by the persecutor Domitian, who brought him to Rome, and sentenced him to be thrown into a caldron of boiling oil. From this death he was miraculously delivered; and being brought out of the caldron unhurt was banished to the Isle of Patmos; in which place of desolation he received the visions recorded in the Book of Revelation. Upon the death of Domitian he was recalled from banishment, and returned to Ephesus; where new scenes of labour awaited him. Various errors and heresies were now springing up to trouble the church; and the Apostle was appointed to contend earnestly for the truth; in defence of which he was inspired by the Holy Ghost to write the Gospel and Epistles that bear his name. His life was preserved until he reached his hundredth year. But his last years were full of bodily weakness and infirmity. He was then carried by the disciples into any public meeting, where his presence was deemed requisite. His perpetual exhortation to the disciples was—"Little children love one another." He died in peace at Ephesus.

It is the usual opinion with men that St. John was remarkable for softness and tenderness of disposition, and that his natural character was one of unusual gentleness. That his *gracious* dispositions were thus marked is very true; and also, that he had a native warmth of affection, filling him with tenderness and a disposition to sympathy; but generally speaking, his real character seems to be

too carelessly considered; and, of course, to be erroneously represented from this false impression respecting him. Looking into the statement of all his conduct and spirit, as in early association with his brother James, we have seen that there was no difference; they were equally ambitious, proud, bigoted, and resentful; and equally received from the Lord that severe rebuke—"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." This arose from a participation alike in the inheritance of a fallen and selfish nature. If we examine the traits of character alluded to, we shall clearly discern corruption, and a height of self-preference, with hot and uncharitable passions. When the request was proffered that they might possess chief dignities, it was not in the perception of a *spiritual* understanding; they were dreaming of honors, titles, and greatness, such as belong to earthly empires; and knew not what they asked. This ignorance was exceedingly culpable, because it followed immediately upon Christ's declaration of the spirituality of his cause, to which it would seem they had been inattentive, or prejudiced, listeners. There was a want of the spirit becoming sinners so utterly unworthy in themselves, and of proper feeling towards their associates, over whom they wished to have a pre-eminence. Neither were they properly humbled when Jesus rectified their mistaken ideas, by speaking of his baptism and cup, showing that the way to *his* honours lay through deep participation in his troubles; for ignorantly, and with self-confidence, they answered without reflection, "We are able;" as if, were this the only condition to the procuring of the seat of honour, it would be easily paid. The resentment expressed against the Samaritans was unholy and condemnable; especially in seeking a cloke, under the ancient example of Elisha, which had no application to the present circumstances: and in which sin worked with

great subtlety, seeking a plausible excuse for itself; their resentment also, being much more on account of the affront offered to themselves, than in simple zeal for Christ. National hatred of the Samaritans no doubt mingled with this strong emotion, and called forth the charge from the Lord, which was intended to direct them to self-examination. From these particulars we receive an impression respecting the disposition of the two brothers, which would induce us to pronounce them both to be sons of thunder, in a *natural* point of view, rather than children of the softer zephyr breathing gentleness and peace. That John was sensible of this in his own experience seems manifested, by the confession he made, of having acted with heat and intemperance respecting the man they had forbidden to preach. And that James also was brought to see his own error is conspicuous through the record of his advancing state of grace; wherein he demonstrated the power of the Lord to subdue all things to himself, rendering him, ere the close of his earthly course, a son of thunder in a better sense, with energies, heat, and vehemence, sanctified to charitable purposes, and leading to a consistent life and death full of glory to his God and Saviour.

In the advancing days of John, we have a greater opportunity of discovering the sanctification of his soul, in the regulation and consecration of his passions, as a disciple and witness for Christ. His life was longer, and his publicity greater in consequence. He was also, undoubtedly, admitted into a very distinguished rank, by the free grace and will of Jesus, who chose him for his own peculiar friend, and allowed him to appropriate the exceeding privilege of being styled "that disciple whom Jesus loved." His youthful fervour, his tenderness combined with intrepidity, his confidential trust in the love of Jesus to him, were

all dispositions which, we may suppose, the holy human soul of our Lord would delight in and appreciate ; and it pleased him thus to enter into, and communicate, as man, the sweet and pure enjoyments of tender true friendship. This selection of John, as a chief friend, was not to the injury of the rest, whom Jesus truly loved ; and it gave an opportunity for them to display the generous satisfaction, which it was their duty, and privilege, to feel in the will of their beloved master. In this sacred intimacy with Jesus, John gradually imbibed the mind of him whom he loved ; nor did he lean upon that breast without deriving thence a kindred spirit. And very interesting it is to us to perceive, how all his heat, and strong passion, and high ambition, being lodged in the bosom of that blessed Lord, were thereby tempered, and as it were given back to him in the purified state produced by incarnate love. We see in John, as a maturing Christian, the power of knowing his privilege, and yet possessing it in modesty. He was not one who denied the grace that had been bestowed ; he was forward to claim what had been freely given ; and speaks of himself under this distinction, not as one who vaunts himself, but as esteeming it preferable to be one whom Jesus loved, rather than to possess any other name, title, or portion : and in the little circumstance wherein he asked the secret of the Lord, not doing so in any display of his own favour with Christ, but chiefly with the object of gratifying Peter whom he greatly loved, and of relieving his mind from solicitude. It was the same modesty, and *just* estimate of the nature of his privilege, which made him so promptly correct the notion, that the Lord had singled him out as one who should live under any peculiar outward distinction. 'This he now ceased to covet ; it was enough for him to live in Jesus' love ; John xxi. 23.

The timidity, which betrayed him to desert his Master in the garden, prevailed but transiently ; love brought him quickly back, and fastened him to the suffering steps his Lord was then treading. Heart-rending as must have been the sight, of that sacred form now bathed in blood, of that bosom on which he had leaned, now heaving with sighs of sorrow, and of that blessed body and soul made a bleeding, agonizing sacrifice on the tree, John's heart was charged to steadfastness in the work of sympathy, and in the grace of confession ; and notwithstanding the agony, no doubt endured in his own breast, and the peril to which his own life was exposed by venturing to acknowledge him who was thus rejected by men, he pressed to the heights of Calvary, and there stood before his Lord, exhibiting to him that one faithful friend at least would watch his dying breath. We may readily conceive with what strong emotion he would be an eye witness of all that was transacted in those awful hours ; and how he would listen to the last charge of friendship received from the voice of the Lord ; neither, perhaps, are we at a loss to imagine what were the affections which kept him nailed as it were, to the spot where Jesus hung ! In proportion to the depth of his affliction, and the extent of his love, he would enter into all those interests which afterwards crowded upon the little flock ; and with a tender solicitude wait for the unfolding of that mystery which hung over the cross and grave of Jesus ; and would consequently experience a fervour in his joy of faith, corresponding with his character and exercises during the time of grief. This is evidently the case in what is recorded of his conduct and words, from the time when Jesus' risen body was missed from the tomb, until his ascent into glory.

The gracious warmth of devotion was retained by John unto the end of his pilgrimage. In his

fellowship with Peter he modestly gave the pre-eminence to him as the elder, leaving him to be the chief speaker, but never shrinking from the suffering association ; herein he evinced his faithfulness to his eternal friend, and his true affection to his earthly companion—courageously standing with him in all perils—accompanying him through all labours—enduring with him stripes and imprisonment—and so steadfastly and consistently testifying of the same truth, that he is acknowledged by Paul a *pillar* in the church, Gal. ii. 9. A *strong* one he proved to be, receiving the shocks of persecution, of heresy, and of all evil, with immovable firmness and intrepidity ; and being willing joyfully to suffer the utmost extent of the rage of devils and men, rather than relinquish one peculiarity of the gospel salvation. This intrepid and scrupulous attention to truth is said to have been displayed in a story related of him in respect of Cerinthus, who was a leader in heresy, and who, entering the bath at the time when John likewise was there, was saluted by an open and vehement expression of horror as a first born child of Satan, and monster of impiety. And in the inspired volume, we have a sufficient demonstration that he justified his title as “son of thunder,” pouring forth from his testimony, by loud, distinct, and awful bursts of holy eloquence, forewarning of a final storm, and calling upon men to hear. In his gospel and epistles written after his return from banishment, we have the important example of this character, sanctified to be an inspired and powerful advocate against heretical doctrines. His gospel was called forth by the existence of that heresy which denies the divinity of our Lord : there being many in his day, who held the ruinous opinions of the Socinians, and refused to honour Christ as very God. On this great and all important theme, the Holy Ghost, through the pen

of the Apostle, gives conclusive witness, crowning Emmanuel as the very, the essential, the eternal God. This gospel, being designed chiefly to establish this truth, goes out at large upon it, omitting many of the transactions recorded by the other evangelists, and adhering to this principal point of revelation. His epistles were directed in equal rebuke of the equally ruinous heresy of those who in the Apostle's days began to deny the reality of Christ's *human* nature. They imagined that our Lord's appearance in the world was not in a real body of the substance of the Virgin Mary, but only an appearance or phantom; and that the whole transaction on Calvary was in a kind of visionary representation. Against this destructive notion the Apostle writes with an energy as full and vehement, as that which he evinced upon the opposite error; insisting, especially in the first epistle, that he witnessed of him whom he had *handled* and seen, who had verily appeared in the flesh, coming by water and by blood; and plainly asserting, that whosoever denied that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is an antichrist, the enemy of all truth, having no part in eternal life, and cut off from all hope; since he denieth the blood which alone cleanseth from all sin. In the second and third epistles, he writes with an ardent testimony against heretics, shewing with what severity they ought to be treated, for the benefit of the body; and warning every one not to receive such nor bid them God speed, for in so doing they were partakers in their evil deeds.

This severity against error was the genuine fruit of the Spirit, proved by its zeal for the real prosperity of the church, and by that remarkable spirit of compassion and gentleness demonstrated by John towards sinners in general, and towards such as had transgressed against their first love. His writings are filled with tender commiseration for

lost souls, with affectionate counsels and warnings to the ignorant; and with the constant presentation of Jesus, as the Lamb, and Sacrifice, and Saviour, whose ready mercies were waiting, and willing for the help of the miserable. That he possessed an experimental sense, and practical acquaintance in the spirit, of these revelations, was continually manifested in his own conduct; especially, in what is related of him when far advanced in years, respecting the condition of a young man towards whom he had acted as a father in the gospel; but who having backsliden from the profession of the faith, had been plunged from one crime to another, until at length he united himself to a band of robbers. The Apostle, hearing of this, resolved upon seeking the lost sheep; and hoping that the sight of his aged friend and instructor might have some effect, he placed himself in the passes infested by the banditti; when, as he anticipated, he was attacked by the robbers. His hopes were also answered; for the wretched young man, beholding him with whom he had once possessed the privilege of friendship and fellowship, was overwhelmed with confusion, and convicted of his sin. He sought to flee from the presence of the Apostle, but was pursued by his fatherly voice, imploring him to return and re-enter the fold. The eternal Spirit owned the voice of tender remonstrance, sent it into the wanderer's heart with an arresting power; and St. John had the bliss of a holy conformity to his Master, the great shepherd and bishop of the soul; for he returned from the mountains with the sheep that had been lost, rejoicing! This anecdote seems well authenticated, and exhibits the power of zealous Christian love. But we do not depend upon traditionary records for the evidence of the Apostle's abundant possession of this grace; since the Scripture history respecting him is sufficiently decisive upon this point.

There is much of *character* developed in the writings of St. John. The first Epistle is full of the Spirit of appropriating love. The first three verses describe a state of experience, in which the soul is evidently replenished with the rich assurance of an interest in a covenant God revealed in the incarnate word, combined with a grateful sense of the mercy by which this revelation had been made to the heart, the mind, and the eye ; and we discover in the whole of the important doctrinal statement a blessed individual privilege, of which the Apostle was humbly and thankfully sensible. In the fourth verse the Apostle reveals his strong relative affection, moving him, as we discern in other parts of the Epistle, to an earnest desire for the establishment of the church, in the joy resulting from an experimental knowledge of the Son of God. Passing onwards through the Epistle, we follow the Apostle in a track of love, mercy, and zeal, wherein he labours to distribute the riches of the covenant, according to the condition and circumstances of various souls ; pleading for holiness, showing the spring of it, testifying of forgiveness of sin, proclaiming the advocacy of Christ's office ; the joy experienced in the liberty of love ; the privilege of having an unction resting upon the understanding and heart ; the necessity of decided separation from the world ; the blessedness of union and fellowship with Jesus, and of being interested in that divine care which is the preservation of the soul from heresy, sin, and apostacy, and the source of eternal life. These, and every other prominent truth contained in revelation, are presented by the Apostle in a tone of affectionate earnestness, well according with his character and office as an Apostle and an experienced saint of the Lord.

His second Epistle is addressed to some lady, and designed to be an encouragement to her in every good work, and a testimony to the grace

of the Lord as displayed towards her. Her Christian course, and apparently influential station and conduct, had proved a blessing to the church in general, and had received peculiar marks of the divine blessing; he therefore greets her in Christ with great respect, speaks to her as an elder whose testimony he concluded would be acceptable to her, rejoices in her election, prays for a continued blessing upon her, cautions her against heresy, and in the spirit of the letter evinces Christian politeness, liberality of mind, a sense of our dependance upon divine strength, and a rich experience of the high communion which kindred souls enjoy in the love and service of Christ.

His third Epistle is written to Gaius as to one well-beloved in the Lord; it breathes the spirit of courtesy, charity, and high estimation of works wrought in faith, especially of such as were discharged for the spiritual prosperity of souls, and in the dispositions of humility and self-renunciation. In this Epistle he also demonstrates his sense of the Apostolic authority which he possessed, to reprove the vain boastings of the proud and ignorant, and his determination to exercise his authority in reproof of offenders.

The Apostle's visions, recorded in the book Revelation, have received our attention in our view of prophecy; but what respects the developement of the Apostle's own character may receive our more particular notice. Assuredly the evidence is strong, of a soul elevated above the power of persecution, happy in the midst of outward desolation, and highly sensible of the *privilege* of being a sufferer for the Lord, and a companion in the tribulation of the saints, and fervently breathing after the glory of Christ's kingdom, of which he possessed clear and spiritual apprehensions. He well understood the heights and dignities to which redemption exalted the subjects of grace, who are

kings and priests unto God, and are blest through the blood which washeth from all sin. That he was conscious of sorrow, and of the need of patience, is evident; yet he was *in the Spirit*, heard the voice of the Almighty, believed in the approaching liberation of the redeemed from every bondage, and could with heartfelt confidence *desire* the conclusion of all things, and the speedy approach of his Lord. See Rev. i. 3, 5; vi. 7, 9, 10, 18. We find him in the succeeding chapters proving himself a faithful ambassador; ardent for the further revelation of the eternal mind, that he might receive, and impart, what should glorify his Lord; greatly affected, so as to weep much, at the apparent obstacle to this attainment, and grateful for comfort and assurance. In the possession of these privileges, we find him maintaining a modest lowliness of soul; humbled before the glorious manifestation of his Saviour's exalted majesty; sensible of his own unworthiness, teachable, and waiting for the revelation, and its interpretation; and obedient to every direction which was given him. See chapters ii. iii. iv. v. 4. vii. 13, 14. x. 4, 9, 10. xi. 1, 2. xxi. 2. Yet this unfolding of his character does not leave it without any charge of error; we see him unduly excited to wonder, as if the revelation of the abounding iniquity he beheld surpassed credit; and for this gently reproved, chap. xvii. 6, 7. We find him confused in his perceptions, and not sufficiently discriminating between the manifestation of *Christ's* person, and that of a created angel; for which he calls forth caution and remonstrance from the messenger of the Lord; chap. xix. 10. xxii. 8. The chief features, however, are of the excellent grace of the Holy Ghost abundantly operative in his whole heart and mind, filling him with spiritual joy in Christ, with enraptured views of the kingdom established in him, with fervent love for the redeemed, and with

ardent longings for the day of Christ. See especially chap. xxii. 8. xx. 21.

By uniting together the several parts of this interesting record of St. John's character, we are in possession of important truths ; we see what the grace of the covenant has effected in the soul of a brother sinner ; and how high is that standard of experience and knowledge in the Lord, to which man, as anointed by the Holy Ghost, may attain. To this disciple we must undoubtedly give our affectionate tribute, as a true saint and cross bearer ; as one who lived and died to the honour of the blessed Redeemer ; and we rejoice in the entire persuasion, that he ripened for final blessedness, went home to his Master, and eternally rests on that bosom, where he delighted on earth to repose, and thence deriving the fulness of the bliss of his eternal love.

We have now to bring these particulars into their application to our own individual experience.

In retracing the view of James and John, under their first days of discipleship, we learn some very important lessons, which may be profitable, whatever be the natural turn of our dispositions or tempers. We may be justified in saying, that, however the *degree* of our native ambition may vary, we have all some measure of this character within us ; expressing itself perhaps variously, but discoverable as one of the essential parts of our nature, and, unless this propensity be sanctified, leading us into many sins and many mortifications. It is evident, that, in the profession of Christ's cause, it is a leaven continually working ; so that some of his servants, eminent in station and office, debase their profession by a mixture of motive and feeling, perhaps scarcely discovered by themselves, but betraying them into tempers, manners, neglects, and desires, which spring from a corrupt

and selfish principle. As this disposition is often able to cloak itself under an appearance of zeal, of love, and of what *we* call noble hopes and aims, it is the more to be suspected and dreaded. Especially, if our natural temper be warm, sanguine, proud, or impatient, it is more than probable we may, in our discipleship, be gratifying some such emotion, even when we are pretending high spiritual designs. The example of James and John should teach us not to be too confident of our freedom from this evil, but to look well into the *spring* of our actions. Even in that hope, which lives and runs high in the heart, of being admitted into dignities and distinctions in Christ's kingdom, we should not be ignorant of a danger that may mingle with the emotion. It is a privilege to be ranked with his *visible* witnesses and highly crowned heirs, and *love* will press to this distinction. But we must never separate the desire from the recollection that the pathway to these honours is through a present inheritance very contrary to the gratification of the flesh; especially bearing in mind that there is not, and cannot be, any participation in the spiritual elevation we ask, but with the accompaniment of a reduced, meek, and self-renounced spirit: therefore the eminent in Christ's kingdom pass through painful baptisms, and drink of bitter cups. Perhaps we are ready to agree in this sentiment; but we possess it with a spirit of independence. "*We are able,*" is the language sometimes breaking out of ardent but inexperienced hearts! This is a grievous error, springing from self-ignorance; and as we advance to the possession of substantial blessings in the Lord, we shall learn the folly of these vain imaginations. But we should strive to believe our weakness *now*, according to the testimony of the word; and, in our professed desires after eminent grace, think upon our own helplessness, and de-

pendence upon the sovereignty and mercy of the Lord. In no circumstances do we require greater watchfulness upon the spirit that actuates us, than when we are met by opposition to our conceit of what is due to us from others. Controversy, especially, is usually a strong hold for sin and Satan; the pride and self-importance of the sinful heart are offended; words and expressions are adopted, which rankle in the mind and soul, and baneful resentments are kindled in the breast. We generally think under these excitements that we are hot for *truth*, and are offended for Christ's sake. Alas! like the apostles, our angry wish for fire or conviction from heaven upon our rejectors, is too often found to be offence at the slight or insult passed upon ourselves. Were it not thus, our weapons would be spiritual, and our dispositions meek. How useful then will it prove to us, if, on all such occasions, we ask with integrity, *What spirit we are of?* since whatever is not of the mind and spirit of Christ is as chaff, that must be separated from us by discipline, or which will lead us into destruction. Let us not, however, mistake the divine requirement. The meekness which becomes the Christian is not *tame*ness and *insensibility*; every witness should be as a *son of thunder*, pouring forth the rousing testimony of the divine name, and labouring to stimulate sinners in seeking the only refuge. Such messengers from heaven are intended to be witnesses of the storm against transgressors, and whilst they shoot the dreadful bolt of heaven, striking terror to the guilty, they will be found instrumental, like the storm in the natural elements, to *clear* the sky. The redeemed shall hereby be brought to the enjoyment of *real* peace, made known to them in the bow of the covenant—Jesus, the Saviour from tempest and storm!

In order to attain the precious grace which was

dispensed to the subduing of natural temper in James and John, we must follow in the steps of our beloved Master, learning of him; for he is meek and lowly of heart. It is thus that we find rest from our angry passions, and imbibe the sweet delights of a mind conformed to our Lord. And surely our hearts will readily admit, that there is no place so much to be coveted as that especially wherein John was privileged to repose his head and heart. We have the liberty of access which will invest us with the blessing; for the bosom of our Lord is always open, and his voice of love invites us to draw near. We should diligently cultivate this liberty, and, when sensibly possessing it, *use* the occasion for asking the free and full communication of the secret of the Lord. Readiness on his part is undoubted; and in this sweet home we may dwell in love, and draw forth all of wisdom and peace, needful for the comfort and furtherance of the life of faith. If we are thus walking with, resting in, living by, the Son of God, we shall have such an inheritance as will endear even the most suffering circumstances of our pilgrimage. Our desire is to be *with him*; and in this affection we can attend him in the times of persecution, temptation, death,—confiding in his encompassing strength, committing our life to him, and familiarizing our minds to the expectation of trial by constant thoughts of *his* dying love. The spirit of the believer will resort to Calvary, will watch by the cross, will embrace a bleeding Saviour; and the sacred scenes, where Jesus suffered and died, have lost none of their attraction to the believing heart: still it lingers near the spot—still the spirit in holy meditation hovers round Calvary, and contemplates the bloody tree. The grave also of Jesus should be frequented by faith. The sufferings of his body and soul on Calvary were followed by his triumphs over death

and hell, made visible in the resurrection : and we must unite the two subjects in our meditation. It is thus that we give honour to the Lord, and receive the cheering manifestation of his accepted work. And the more firmly we believe, and devotedly enter this region, to behold where Jesus lay, and to reflect upon how he left the tomb, so much the more will be our spiritual rejoicing. Like John, we should *run* to the grave, not with his doubts, but in his fervent love ; and, entering in, view our privilege in the liberty of our Surety and Lord. Anxieties of soul are best hushed into peace in these retreats ; and whatever may be the burden which presses upon us, whether of mental, spiritual, or temporal griefs, here unquestionably will be our surest consolation and support. In the believing sight of him whom we embrace as our Deliverer and Life, our thoughts are carried beyond this transitory scene, and we learn to realize the abiding portion which awaits our souls. Not that we are insensible to the sufferings which belong to mortality. The affliction and death of those we love will awaken sympathies, and call forth the sigh that follows conscious bereavement : the endurance of personal griefs, banishment, pains, persecutions, will be *felt* with the proportion of distress in the mind and soul ; and in these things, perhaps, we may “ weep much.” But the believer has a holy check upon human passion, and a sanctified use of his times of sorrow, unknown but through faith. And, certainly, the great secret of possessing a frame of mind prepared for earthly sorrows, is the appropriating life of faith, which leads to strong fellowship with Jesus, and vivid views of eternity.

Let us, in prosecuting this heavenly course receive such edification as is afforded us in the example of John. He, with his associates in the faith, pursued the path of duty, as each day opened

it before them : and we, notwithstanding the many occurrences which might tend to divert us from such regularity, should stir up our minds to diligent vigour ; not allowing our proper avocations to lie neglected on account of times of affliction. A submissive spirit should thus exercise itself, being solicitous to fulfil the various duties which press for our attention. Very frequently outward circumstances render this exertion peculiarly needful, on account of some who may be dependent upon us for bread, or nursing, or sympathy, or ministerial care. Our own distresses must not so absorb us, as to bring disorder or neglect into these channels. An exertion of this description is often blest especially. The Holy Spirit acknowledges this genuine self-denial ; and a particular display of divine mercy ensues. Thus it is rendered in every way profitable. Our Lord is glorified by our strength to rise above calamity ; our own mind is very much defended from the intrusion of unprofitable thoughts ; temptation is very greatly divested of its force, and faith is increased.

Should it please the Lord thus to acknowledge and strengthen us, smiling upon our way in the covenant of his love ; we have a further act of faith to manifest ; we should, like the Apostle, be quick to discern, and acknowledge, the hand of our God in every blessing, in all mercies, or increase of our temporal labours, our ministerial efforts, or personal experience. The words of John, when the blessing descended on their labour in the deep, are well worthy of being registered in our hearts and minds. “ *It is the Lord,*” is a blessed little sentence, when bursting from the heart of a grateful, simple disciple : and as we are accustomed to use it as expressive of those feelings with which we kiss the rod, so we should familiarize it to our hearts when compassions, and deliver-

ances, and providential supplies are given. Without dispute the *fact* is so ; we have no bread, no help, no deliverance, no success with sinners, but what is a *gift* from our own gracious and faithful Saviour ; and the recollection of this should not be absent, or an act of formal reasoning in the judgment, but a spontaneous emotion living in a breast which is accustomed to realize Jesus in every good. Such dispositions will tend to preserve us humble and dependant ; and whilst we wisely interpret the Lord's sayings respecting us, and expect not any exemption from the lot which is common to other men in this world, it will prepare us for giving the welcome of gratitude to every mercy, by which it may be the pleasure of the Lord to distinguish us.

In those relative labours which attend our appointed passage through life, the example of the Apostle may be rendered directive to us. We are required to use Christian courtesy to all men : and it is to be lamented, that many of Christ's followers seem to place this grace in so subordinate a station in the life of faith, as frequently almost to forget that it is included in the Spirit's precept. "*Be courteous—be kind,*" is a sacred injunction, having the divine authority annexed to it, equally with any other command ; and, in fact, it appears evident, that it is of *vast importance* in the life of a believer. As it arises out of gracious influences, so it is the means of dispensing many sweets in the circle, whether domestic or ministerial, in which we may move. And especially as the principles and doctrines and counsel of Christians are very abhorrent to the minds of men yet in their sins, and as even the regenerate have many infirmities of temper and feeling which they have to contend with, it becomes more necessary, that unnecessary offence, or provocation, occasioned by want of tenderness, courtesy, or

politeness of manner and spirit, should be conscientiously avoided. If our own hearts are under the softening influences of grace, our deportment will participate in this holy sweetness; and thus whilst we are decided and unshaken in our testimony for truth, we shall be kind-hearted, and full of compassion to men. The addresses of St. John, as recorded in the Scriptures, are powerful examples of this; and demonstrate, that disciples are by the Holy Ghost, conformed to Jesus in this mind. Whilst cultivating this disposition, we must be equally on our guard lest it degenerate into any thing like a compromising spirit; and lest we so respect the saints, as to lose the prominent view of the Saviour. We are so corrupt, and infirm in our native character, that we are always disposed to sinful extremes; and shall fall into them without great watchfulness and prayer. Thus we have need to observe our own and other's feelings, immediately repelling in them, and in ourselves, any temptation to inordinate idolatrous regard, however highly exalted and estimable the individual may be: "*See thou do it not,*" should be the ready charge upon their hearts and ours. The true end of all communion, and of every ordinance and means, is, that our *joy may be full* in Christ.

In the humble and diligent cultivation of these affections, let us follow after our blessed Lord, using the grace of faith, so as to know and proclaim the glorious nature of our incarnate God; and looking for that glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, in which his honour will be displayed everlasting, and our bliss perfected in him. Keeping these prospects in view, let us always seek to have the power of exclaiming with the Apostle—" *Even so; come quickly, Lord Jesus.*"

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY and ever faithful Saviour ! O touch our hearts at this time with Thy own blessed Spirit, and awaken them to the exercise of fervent love to Thee ; that, in all those views we are privileged to have of Thy glory and grace, we may experience corresponding excitement, in living unto Thee. O do Thou operate in us as Thou dost in Thy redeemed : so as to reduce all our native propensities and passions to the foot of the cross, and make them subservient to Thy glory. O most gracious Redeemer ! Thou art our all : we have no helper but Thee : and we lift up our voice to Thee asking for those influences which may produce Thy complete victory in and over us. Do Thou bring down every high thing that exalteth itself against the kingdom of righteousness and peace ; and establish those purer and more sacred affections, which are the fruit of Thy indwelling grace. We would retain our fervour, vehemence, and warmth of character, but, in connection with that perpetual unction abiding upon us, which alone can render afflictions fruitful to Thee. O in Thy almighty power, sanctify and consecrate every emotion that we have ; and be Thou the Lord of all. We embrace Thy cross, desiring to bear it after Thee with true devotion. O associate Thyself with us, blessed Lord, in all the way, that we may never shrink from days of darkness or trial, that we may never be inconsistent with our union to Thee and Thy cause. Keep us in loving friendship with Thyself, so that we may lean on Thy bosom, listen to Thy communications, and seek to know Thy mind. Bind us unto Thee, that we may be kept in fellowship together,—in the garden, in the cross, in the tomb, and in every duty or suffering of life or death. And O may our

ambition now be hallowed, and brought into that simplicity which aims at the glory of Thy dear name, and the fulfilment of all Thy own will in and by us. Receive our grateful praise for all that Thou hast done for us ; O Lord, impart to us increase of knowledge and of grace ; and in an especial manner bless us with the power of realizing Thee in every dispensation ; and both in seasons of trial and of joy help us to say, "*It is the Lord,*" May this awaken submission in grief, and double our joys. O Lord, answer our hearts' desire ; and let Thy kingdom be established in us and in the earth. " Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus."

MATTHEW THE PUBLICAN.

Matt. ix. 9—13. Mark ii. 14—17. Luke v.
27—32.

As Jesus passed along the sea-coast, he beheld a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom ; towards whom the everlasting purpose of grace had great and special designs. The business of this man was that of a publican, or collector of taxes ; and he appears to have sat on the sea-coast that he might take the customary toll on the goods which were landed. From this employment Jesus called him to embrace the life of a disciple. Passing by him he said, “ follow me : ” and immediately he rose up, left all, and followed Christ. We are informed by St. Luke, that, having resolved upon adhering to Jesus, and on relinquishing his former occupation, he in the first place made a great feast in his own house, to which he invited all those with whom he had hitherto been in the habit of intimacy ; to which feast also he asked the Lord to give his presence. Jesus complying with this request, was reproached by the pharisees as demeaning himself, to eat and drink with publicans and sinners ; but our Lord justified his conduct, by shewing the end for which he came amongst men, which was, to heal the diseased, and to save the lost. From this period, Matthew accompanied Christ in all his ministry upon earth, and was appointed amongst the twelve Apostles. Matt. x. 3. He remained steadfast in the profession ; and, after the ascension of our Lord, wrote the gospel bearing his name. It is not recorded in what manner he

departed this life, but it is generally supposed he suffered martyrdom by fire. His Hebrew name was Levi; but as a publican he bore that of Matthew. As it signifies "*a reward*," it is not improbable that he received it from the Jews as a term of reproach, on account of the mercenary dispositions for which they despised him; a publican being by them considered amongst the most debased of sinners; who for a recompense would help to degrade their country, and countenance its oppressors.

It will be evident to each of us, that, according to external circumstances, Matthew was in a state of personal degradation; but his occupation as a publican did not *necessarily* involve him in guilt; neither do we find it a business *prohibited* by the law of repentance. Luke iii. 13. The Jews were reduced in the scale of nations by their own provocation, and it now became their duty to submit to the humiliating condition to which the Lord had appointed them. Christian principles and obedience to every divine revelation called for justice; therefore it was an incumbent obligation to render to Cæsar the things which were Cæsar's. Yet, generally speaking, the judgment of the Jews was right respecting the individual characters who exercised the trade of a publican; for when a Hebrew followed this business, it was in many instances a demonstration of many evils, being exercised for gain, and in contempt of the circumstances of abasement to which their nation was reduced by sin. We have reason to suppose that Matthew was one of these, for he seems to have been destitute of all spiritual discernment previously to the call of Jesus; his mind was intent upon the interests which belong to this world, and immersed in the business which yielded him what his heart most coveted; and viewed in

this light, we necessarily consider him as amongst chief sinners. The usual proceedings of these persons were stained with dishonesty and oppression. Not contented with collecting the toll which the law enforced, they made a prey of their brethren, dealing with extortion, and seeking to amass wealth by every means, however unjust or rapacious. On this account John Baptist so faithfully exhorted those who asked his counsel, not to exact more than what had been appointed them. These accompaniments upon the employment of a publican induced a further evil. No respectable Jew would associate with a man following this calling ; they deemed him worse than a heathen. So strong and persevering was this national separation from them, that Jesus, representing the conduct needful to be observed in extreme cases of impenitency, grounds his direction upon the known principle, saying, " let him be unto thee as a heathen man *and a publican.*" The consequence of this contempt from men of character and repute, was, that publicans associated together, or with the most abandoned characters ; Jesus himself classing them with harlots, saying, "*publicans and harlots.*" Thus in occupation, in habits, in principles, in association, they were a depraved set of men ; and were usually remarkable for covetousness and injustice.

When these things are taken into consideration, the act of grace and its results towards Matthew will appear the more wonderful. It would seem that this redeemed sinner thought so himself ; for it is remarkable, that, whilst Mark and Luke record him as one restored to Hebrew dignity, and call him *Levi*, he registers the work of mercy to himself as shewn to *Matthew the publican.* This little trait lets us into a secret in his heart, and shews us how he had learnt to understand the riches of divine grace ; and that now he was not

ashamed to confess that his distinctions were wondrous acts of mercy from the Saviour who had called him, one of the chief of sinners, and most unworthy. There is another little trait in his character, which is interesting as a feature of the new creature in Christ. In his own gospel he only records that Jesus sat at meat in his house, and that many publicans and sinners were present. But St. Luke tells us how and why Jesus sat there, even because Matthew made a great feast, and had invited sinners to come, and hear, and see his Saviour. No doubt, modesty and unfeigned humility led him unaffectedly to conceal rather than to boast of what he had done, and in the sense of his own vileness to be chiefly occupied with the thought of the Lord's condescension in coming under his roof. Trifling as these little incidents may appear, they are in fact very important, affording us perhaps more decisive marks of character than the more splendid parts of the record. Apostleship, labours, martyrdom, are all great things; but they do not give us such an insight to the inward movements of a heart, as the more apparently insignificant and almost unregistered facts.

The change wrought in Matthew's affections, is one of the most blessed demonstrations of grace that is recorded in the Scriptures. The seizure upon his heart was complete, sudden, and victorious, in a situation most unlikely for such a visitation. Without any previous advantages, without any gradual or preparatory light or ministry, in the midst of transgression, when the mind was laden 'with thick clay,' with passions all sunk, debased, depraved, and associations unholy, unhallowed, unclean. At this moment, and in this state, two simple words loosed every bond of corruption, threw round the soul the bonds of another, a blessed captivity, and drew out the

sinner from his abyss of ruin ! Never was omnipotent grace more conspicuous or more glorified. Let us remark the striking change which instantly became visible, in dispositions, and a life exactly *contrasted* with what he had hitherto been. Instead of covetous hoarding of wealth, his gains are now consecrated to a higher service than carnal gratification. No more a covetous Tax-gatherer, but a generous penitent ; he began his course by dispensing his mammon for furnishing a feast ; not in the mistaken idea that Christ would be gratified by carnal delights, for it seems he well comprehended the life of mortification to which he was now called in following the Lord ; but his object was, ere he parted for ever from his former connexions, to give to sinners like himself an opportunity to hear the same word which had penetrated his heart ; he therefore collected sinners together, and placed them before Jesus ; in this act, evincing generosity, charity, zeal, humility, and a spiritual discernment into the nature of the kingdom of *grace*, and of the efficacy of Jesus' sovereign word. Thus he bid farewell for ever to unrighteous traffic ; thus in *mercy* he severed himself from those who trod the way of death ; thus he entered the straight and narrow way, began a life altogether opposed to every former habit, and adhered to that life in love, in faithful, spiritual, and suffering discipleship. He has been greatly honoured by the Holy Ghost, not only as a living witness to the cross during his own course of labour, but as the instrument of conveying to all generations the glad tidings of salvation in a gospel written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and presenting us with the history, the precepts, the works of our dear Redeemer, in a style bold, comprehensive, practical, and solemn ; and which has been and shall be blest to the millions of the ransomed who love to hear and read of Emmanuel, Jesus the Saviour.

Such an example is interesting to us whether contemplated as the pattern of our vile nature as sinners, or as exhibiting the matchless power of the Holy Ghost in the new creation. Alas! we behold the faithful reflection of our native propensities in all the evil discoverable in Matthew; for although we do not alike idolize one object, we are all alike idolaters of that which our carnal affections centre in. Some earthly possession, some creature comfort, something which belongs to our natural life, we inordinately adhere to, as if it were our *eternal* all; and for the sake of this idol do we not know that we are ever ready to sacrifice every consideration else, and to embrace the darling of our desires, whatever may be the consequence of such excess. During the power of these dispositions we are in the very degradation which we contemplate in Matthew. The object we are pursuing engrosses every thought and affection; the interests of Zion do not enter into our recollection; we have no time or thought for concerns in which we do not feel any part; and although the neighbourhood may resound with tidings of salvation, and fellow sinners be flocking after Jesus, we continue fastened to our own pursuits, and destitute of all desire for higher and more important demands revealed in the Gospel. We usually disdain the censure or opinions of our fellow men. One who is wedded to any favourite pursuit is bent upon hardening himself against what other men may judge of his case. He generally considers his censurers to be under the power of prejudice or ignorance, or equally condemnable with himself, and therefore inadequate to judge his case; and finding innumerable sinners in the earth who have the same taste as himself, he is contented to associate with them, and thus to be confirmed in his own debased judgment. We cannot but be conscious that this is our own character, although perhaps the nature

of our pursuit may not be quite so disreputable as that of the publican. On all occasions we are fettered by love of our own way, and choose those for companions who will make us most easy in that way ; and we should remember, that the righteous God does not make those distinctions in favour of *our* particular sin which *we* do, but that covetousness, which is idolatry, on whatever object the passion may work, is an abomination in the sight of the Lord. Feelings of alarm ought to arise if we are yet in the bond of iniquity ; and if not, feelings of abasement and humble sorrow should arise, that ever we *were* in such a condition of debasement before God.

We have not only the Lord's denunciation, and precepts, as expressive of his abhorrence of such a course ; but the nature of a gracious operation in the heart demonstrates its contrariety to a state of acceptance ; for when the spirit produces the effectual change, he directs his power to the destruction of this native evil. The blessed effect of grace in Matthew is an example of the same work in every age ; for whenever a sinner is called from the paths of destruction, it is because Jesus passing by has spoken the word which the Holy Ghost witnesses, by his covenant purpose rendering it prevailing. Such words of Christ, however simple, short, or unadorned, contain in them the divine invincible purpose, and are elevating, sanctifying, liberating in their designs ; nor can they ever fail of producing the result which we have seen in this man. Idols are dropped, sinful pursuits are renounced, wicked associations are broken ; and the affections, being turned by supernatural power out of the channel in which they have been accustomed to run, find another course flowing in the opened way which the Spirit has now directed them to seek. If we are changed from our natural state of carthliness and ignorance,

we can trace in ourselves the very line of conduct pursued by Matthew. Our separation from the world is not what is represented by the world; it is not uncharitable, self-conceited, or a spirit of disdain towards fellow sinners; this is impossible if we have any sense of our own debt to grace. Our desires will be towards the best interests of those we leave; and if we could persuade them, we would fain make them partakers in our liberty and peace. For this reason, we bring them in prayer before the Lord, and would induce them to come and hear his gracious words, if they would receive our invitation to *spiritual* delights. Our desertion of the gains belonging to secular pursuits, which possibly we now find inconsistent with our integrity before God, is not, as ignorant persons imagine, the effect of wild enthusiasm which parts with a known good for some vain chimera; but it is the sober determination of seeking the one thing needful; for the sake of which we are graciously willing to forego the unsatisfying and dying greatness of a perishing world. That we are not mistaken in our estimate is made evident by the steady affection which adheres to our heavenly Master, finding in him a portion that never disappoints, and which even in the most painful worldly circumstances continues to be preferred by the real disciple.

Let us earnestly covet these best things, and be willing to leave all and follow Christ. If we have riches, beware of trusting in them, since they are uncertain, and often destructive possessions. If we have them not, beware of coveting them, lest they should ensnare us into practices, society, and feelings destructive to the soul. If we have by grace been delivered from the snare, compassionate our fellow sinners who are yet in ignorance, labour to make them acquainted with the great Redeemer, and to show them practically how great is his free

salvation which embraces the chief of sinners, converting them into vessels unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use. Thus may we exhibit the transforming power of Jesus' word, and live as the new creature glorifying the everlasting covenant in him.

PRAYER.

WE beseech Thee, O most merciful and gracious Saviour, to turn Thy compassionate grace towards us, with that omnipotent purpose which converts and cheers the soul. Our miserably apostate state of nature need not be told unto Thee, for Thou knowest what we are, and hast beheld us in all the miserable wandering and alienated condition in which we have lived without Thee in the world. We look back with shame and sorrow, O Lord, upon the base and degraded state which once satisfied our affections; and we confess that we have proved ourselves utterly unworthy Thy favour. How truly may we express also our wondering admiration of that matchless covenant which embraces the lost, and brings in the wretched apostate to allegiance and love. O our God, marvellous are all Thy ways, and matchless the compassion which teaches us to believe and hope. Come, blessed Lord, and let us feel an increase of Thy mighty power in our hearts, constraining us to press after Thee with settled affections, and the surrender of all for Thee. And O may there be nothing in this world that has power to detain our hearts one moment from Thy call to discipleship, and the life of faith; loose every bond and fetter which would hold us from Thy love; and throw around us those pure and precious bonds which shall fasten us everlastingly to Thee. And never, O Lord, may any event in life or death

cause us to doubt whether Thou lovest us indeed, or to hesitate in showing our love to Thee, whatever it may demand. Look we pray Thee, O Lord, on poor sinners, who like ourselves have been long bound by the chains of darkness, and set them free as prisoners of hope, that they may come unto Thee and find liberty and day. And give us grace to seek their edification, striving to manifest the fulness of Thy salvation, and to show that all who follow Thee inherit manifold more in this world than any perishing good they have left, and in the world to come, eternal life. O vouchsafe us this blessing, merciful God, in Jesus's blessed Name. Amen.

PHILIP THE APOSTLE.

Matt. x. 3 ; John i. 43—46.

WE have a very circumscribed history of this Apostle ; he is mentioned by St. Matthew as one whom the Lord appointed to fill the office of an Apostle, being of the twelve, but he is mentioned by St John as previously called to discipleship. We are informed by this Evangelist, that Jesus *would* go forth into Galilee, and that finding Philip, he bid him follow him ; to which call he was obedient,—that being convinced by his interview with Christ that he was the true Messiah, he sought his friend Nathanael, declaring to him that he believed Jesus of Nazareth to be the very person of whom Moses and the prophets did write. Nathanael objecting to this opinion, the contemptible character of the supposed birth-place of Jesus, Philip invited him, ere he allowed his prejudices to prevail, to come and see for himself, and then to form his judgment. Having prevailed with his friend to take this counsel, he introduced him to Christ. From this time Philip attended the steps of Jesus. We read of him upon two interesting occasions, one in John vi. 5, where our Lord made trial of his knowledge and faith, and when Philip answered by declaring the total insufficiency of their present provisions to supply the hunger of the vast multitude Christ proposed to feed—and, in John xiv. 8, where he expressed a sentiment full of ignorance, and brought upon himself a reproof, for his slowness to understand the mystery of the divine nature, and of the manifestation of the Father in the incarnate Son ; procuring, however, according to Christ's constant method

of patient love, a further lesson of instruction on this important truth. We have no further history of this Philip, nor any account of his death; he was evidently faithfully united with the rest of the Apostles, both before and after the ascension of our Lord; and was one of the honoured witnesses of the great salvation, Acts i. 12—14.

Philip is declared to be a chosen vessel of mercy, *found* by the great Shepherd, who purposely bent his steps to the region where this lost sheep was to be gathered to the fold; towards whom, as in the case of other followers, he extended the effectual operation of the Spirit, uniting him to himself as one of his steadfastly adhering witnesses. When thus brought near to the shepherd of his soul, he received an increasing measure of divine illumination; he seems to have been acquainted with the scriptures, and with the nature of that testimony which they contain respecting the great deliverer; and, notwithstanding his Jewish prejudices, he was enabled to accept the evident agreement existing between the witness and the person of our Lord. The Holy Ghost in his triumphant power cast down this barrier in his mind, and opened the way for the entrance of Jesus into his affections and judgment. We speedily discover the genuine effect of that heavenly baptism which he received, in the glowing fervour with which he embraced the interests of his friend; zeal, and natural affection, instantly co-operating under the Spirit's influence to remind him of Nathanael's soul, and to fill him with affectionate desires for his privileges in Christ. No doubt he would be prepared for the objection urged by his friend: he knew the prejudices of his nation, and the character of Nathanael; but he acted with great judgment and prudence, not pressing the reception of the faith by *his* word,

but inviting him to a candid exercise of his own understanding, and an upright investigation of the claims of Jesus.

Notwithstanding these favourable beginnings, and the faithfulness also of Philip's discipleship even to the end, we find in him much ignorance and many clouds, which appear rather surprising, considering the clearness with which he seemed to understand the correspondence of our Lord's person with prophecy, and the favourable opportunities he had for the furtherance of his views ; but we have many instances of this obstinate struggle of the night of nature against the dawning day ; and see, in such histories, the great necessity that existed for the further plenitude of the Holy Ghost by whom the shades might be dispersed. Philip, however, is not to be excused ; he had seen the miracles performed by the Lord, he had witnessed his power over all creation, and should not have allowed any doubt or hesitation as to the ability of Christ to feed the multitude ; and he also received such constant divine lessons, which revealed the union of the sacred persons in the Godhead, and expressly declared the oneness of Christ with the Father, that his want of discernment savoured of perverseness, and had in it criminal unbelief. Yet, in the midst of this evil, we discover the flow of genuine-true affection, and the feelings of one in whom the spirit of adoption dwelt in power. He was utterly disconsolate at the thought of losing the personal presence of his Master, in whose society he had tasted every purest and dearest enjoyment of the soul ; he was ready to sink in sadness and depression of spirit, and could not imagine any source of consolation equal to the degree of affliction, excepting what might be obtained by some more enlarged views of the everlasting Father. Were this granted him, he could believe that he and his afflicted com-

panions might still derive comfort into their hearts, and that this vision would suffice to satisfy their anxious minds. These were desires that could not have existed had not his affections felt *reconciled* to the Father. A wish to behold the eternal God, and confidence that such a revelation is one of peace and satisfaction, arises from the Spirit's influence in the soul; who takes away the natural enmity and dread of a sinner, bringing the heart into possession of *filial* love. Erroneous and dark as were the thoughts of Philip, we must not overlook this demonstration of a gracious state, bespeaking the favour already received from the heavenly indwelling teacher, and affording a pledge of what he was afterwards to receive from the same divine and omnipotent Friend. The anointing from above would speedily teach him all things; and, from an ascended Saviour, he would learn the riches of the glorious mystery. For this blessing, along with the rest, Philip waited, and with them was visited by that descending Holy Ghost, who invested him with fulness of knowledge and grace.

Like Philip, we are all indebted to an act of free grace, when first we are *found* and made disciples of the cross. And he, who in his own determinate counsel *would* go into Galilee for this favoured soul, *will* come in the same grace to all whom he purposes to make members of his mystical body; these, as the scripture declares, receiving an effectual call, making them willing in the day of God's power. Experience will establish this truth: for if we look into our own history as believers, we invariably come to this conclusion, that if the Lord had not found us, and overcome us by the persuasive and invincible grace of the Spirit, we never should have found him, nor have yielded to the sacred requirement of a *spiritual*

surrender to him. This by no means destroys the necessity, or duty, of making efforts in behalf of ourselves or others, for the Lord will work through means ; and, now that his bodily presence is removed from us, does in a particular manner enjoin us to seek the lost, and to ask of him the blessings of the Spirit. But in every instance of a *prospered* means, Jesus is the divine author and finisher of faith, and seeketh and saveth the soul, with a freedom and sovereignty equal to that displayed towards Philip. We may learn, from the example of this disciple, the great benefit to be derived from becoming acquainted with the scriptures. It is our duty to read, and lay up in our minds, the testimony of Moses and the prophets respecting Messiah. The fulfilment of these revelations, in the person of Jesus, does not render the revelation itself unserviceable to the Christian. On the contrary, we are privileged to read the prophetic page with a double interest, finding it replenished with many sweets, which yield their richest fragrantcy now that Messiah is come, and that the life, and death, and glory of our Lord has confirmed and explained the testimony. A comparison of the Old Testament with the gospel revelation is important, if we would possess comprehensive views of our Lord's kingdom ; and will exceedingly enrich our souls, in the experience which is so essential to a stable profession of the faith. And it is a great privilege to be able in this sense to say, we have found him of whom Moses and the prophets did write ; for this comprehends all that Jesus is in his person, offices, and appropriated love. That we need a daily increase to our attainments in this respect, our own hearts will testify. Our surprise at Philip's apparent inconsistent darkness and unbelief ceases, when we understand ourselves. In our own bosom we detect the same workings of the old nature, and

a propensity *practically* to act as inconsistently as Philip. How readily we lose sight of the power of our Lord to feed, multiply, and satisfy us, or the souls whose necessities we contemplate! We are creatures prone to judge by *sense*; and if any present difficulty meets us in our way, we forget every past evidence of divine power and mercy, and dispute whether on the present occasion Jesus can or will deliver, or do the work of power. Our profession as Christians is full of these dark shades: and indeed, we may possibly discover a degree of this darkness, obscuring the soul almost upon *every* renewed opportunity, in which we are proved! It is true the Lord knows what he designs to do, and we are not informed by express words, or direct promises to us made at the moment, of what he will effect; but ours is properly a life of *faith* and not of sight: we know the heart, we know the power, we know the past works of our Lord, we are to shew when he proves us, that we can on this ground trust in him; yet alas! instead of this, we too often fall into despondency, and brood over what we call impossibilities or improbabilities, when we should be looking to the covenant faithfulness in the Lord. Our likeness to Philip may also be traced in what respects the doctrinal views we profess. It is very affecting to feel, and see, how much of darkness exists on these points; and that, even with disciples who honestly love the Saviour, there is a cloudy judgment, a prejudiced understanding, a dulness and perverseness on some parts of revelation, quite out of character with their opportunities and profession. Even with such as have by mercy obtained clear perceptions, there are times when *practically* they seem as if enveloped by clouds, especially when great distress has prevailed to agitate the mind; in such seasons the eye of faith seems to be comparatively dim, and even believers express impatient wishes and

desires ; such as would intimate, that long as they had been with Jesus, they had not known him. Hearts experimentally acquainted with the temptations and trials, incident to a pilgrimage in the narrow way, will fully understand how this can be even with such as love the Lord ; and in consequence will acknowledge, that there is a need of receiving perpetual applications of the Spirit through the word, appropriating to us and conveying into the mind, the testimony of Jesus.

We may rejoice, if with *true faith* we can put the request of Philip, “ Lord, shew us the Father,” knowing that no man knoweth the Father, but he to whom the Son shall reveal him, and believing that He and the Father are one, in self-existing eternity and glory, one in perfection, in attributes, in being ; and that as no man hath seen the Father at any time, the only-begotten Son alone, revealing him in himself as the redeeming Word, so we must contemplate him in Jesus, and ask the revelation of Godhead through the work of salvation. Desires so directed will find acceptance, and are genuine marks of an interest in the Lord, which we should gratefully cherish. It is an unspeakable mercy to be delivered from that natural bondage, which makes us dread the presence of the Almighty, and instead of it, to possess confidential filial yearnings after the vision of his countenance. It is a still higher advance in the true life of a believer, if we can also say, “ It sufficeth us.” To have all our hopes, enjoyments, and desires, brought into this centre, is a privilege of unutterable greatness and grace, comprising every thing which belongs to the restoration of a sinful heart, from its wanderings, to its legitimate and originally constituted seat of bliss. It argues spirituality, integrity, devotion ; and is the pledge of that final blessedness, when, entering into the divine glory, we shall behold our God approach in everlasting

nearness to the throne, see and participate in the rest of all the ransomed host, drink of the river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and say in the fullest extent of the words, "It sufficeth us." Let us meditate upon the few simple points of instruction conveyed to us through this character; and earnestly ask of the Lord a holy baptism from the Spirit, filling us with true devotion, as his disciple, who only has life and light; and in whom we shall be conducted to the realms of everlasting peace. •

PRAYER.

WE pray Thee, most merciful and gracious Lord, to visit us in these our meditations and approaches unto Thee, so as to awaken within us a full appreciation of Thy grace to fallen sinners. Teach us to understand what is meant by being lost and ignorant, and to prize the blessings of being found and enlightened; and pour forth upon us that anointing, by which darkness is scattered, and the light of life is revealed. We would obediently follow Thee, embracing that call which bids us enter a pilgrim's course, and we would consider it a distinction, thus to be numbered with those who savingly call Thee Lord. Produce in us, we beseech Thee, those affections which are prepared to cleave to Thee in this spirit; and O fix our hearts upon Thee as the chiefest of ten thousand, and as the centre of all our desires. Deliver us from those mixtures of unbelief and perverseness, which are so dishonourable to Thee; and remind us, that having professed Thy name, we are pledged to demonstrate our confidence in Thy love and power. O give us to this end advancing measures of experience and knowledge; and sanctify our study of Thy word,

blessed Lord, that we may obtain a settled and established perception of Thy nature to the joy of our souls. We wait for such discoveries of Thy glorious perfection, as may suffice for our heart's contentment here and for ever. In Thee, O Lord, is the fulness of blessedness for which we long and pray. O do Thou here in our pilgrimage, think upon us for good. And when Thou art distributing Thy blessings on Thy children, let this blessing descend and rest on us, even the bright beams of Thy countenance, the manifestation of Thyself in the eternal Son. When this mortal conflict is past ; when earth, and all its cares and interests is passing from us for ever ; then break on our departing souls, gild the bed of death by light from Thy love, and lead us up on high to the light that is in Thy unveiled presence. Then, blessed Saviour, shew us the Father, in Thyself reconciled, and become our Father and our God ; and this will suffice us for ever. We ask these blessings as the only portion for which we bend the knee. O give us the inheritance, and bless us everlastingly, Father, Son, and Spirit, our one only God. Amen.

THOMAS.

Matt. x. 3.

WE have no account in the scriptures of the first call of Thomas to discipleship; but, it is evident, he had been numbered with the rest previously to his appointment as an apostle. The evangelist John gives us some interesting particulars respecting the disposition he manifested in the course of his walk with Jesus; and we may turn to these as affording us materials on which to found our opinion of his character.

In the eleventh chapter of St. John's gospel, we find the apostles filled with solicitude on account of their Master, who had resolved upon going to Bethany, that he might restore Lazarus; and from which they endeavoured to dissuade him; observing that, the Jews having in that place so lately expressed their murderous intentions towards him, it would be exposing himself to imminent peril. Finding that the purpose of the Lord was unchangeable, Thomas invited his companions to go up with him, expressing his determination to share in his dangers, and to die with him, should matters come to that extremity; accordingly they accompanied Jesus. In the fourteenth chapter, fifth verse, Thomas expresses his ignorance of a point of doctrine, which Jesus affirmed he had made perfectly plain to his disciples, and declares, that he is quite incapable of understanding what Christ required or revealed upon this particular,—he neither knew whither the Lord was about to go, nor the way. In the twentieth chapter, twenty-fourth verse, Thomas is found absenting himself from the assembly of the apostles; and, on this

occasion, losing the privilege of beholding the Lord, who appeared in the midst of them; and afterwards, when his companions informed him of what they had beheld, violently declaring his disbelief of their words, intimating that their senses had deceived them, but that, for his part, he would not be satisfied by such visionary imagination : unless he could see the print of the nails in his hands and feet, and put his finger into them, and thrust his hand into the wound of his side, he would not be persuaded that He was risen again. In this frame of mind he remained until eight days afterwards, when the apostles were again assembled, and Thomas with them. The satisfaction he had required was now granted to him; for Jesus, suddenly appearing in the midst of them, invited Thomas, if it were necessary to satisfy his unbelieving heart, to do what he had desired—thrust his hand into his side, and his finger into the prints of the nails, and no longer be faithless, but believing. Thomas being overpowered by the glory of this revelation, by which, not only the once crucified body of Jesus was made visible before him, but the omniscient and infinite glory of his divine presence clearly demonstrated in his knowledge of what had passed, instantly exclaimed, in full persuasion of faith, “My Lord, and my God!” His confession was accepted with an accompanying reproof, shewing how superior is that faith, which, without such demonstration to the senses, receives the divine witness. After this occurrence, Thomas remained in unshaken adherence to Christ and the little flock: we find him with them, John xxi. 1, 2. Acts i. 13. It is said that his labours were extensive in the east, and that he suffered martyrdom; but we have not the account of these things in the Scripture.

The disposition of Thomas seems to have been affectionate and ardent. His association with Christ had been dear and precious; otherwise he would not have resolved upon such close adherence to him in the prospect of dangers and death. His affection made him listen with sorrow to his Master's words, when they indicated a purpose to enter into peril; the thought of his exposure to insult and injury was unbearable to him; and it seems that life would be unwelcome to him, were Jesus dead. His language is that of sincere, and tender, and loving devotion, manifesting that all his idea of happiness was centred in the presence of his Lord, and that he understood the claims of friendship, and felt ready to accompany his beloved Master, wherever he might go. In this feeling, however, there was great mixture of ignorance and error. From the manner in which he addresses his brethren, we may gather a degree of dissatisfaction mingling in his love: he seems to have thought that Jesus acted rashly and unwisely, for he utters nothing like assent or approval of the step. But if he will not be dissuaded, and is indeed bent upon the perilous experiment, he intimates that they have nothing more to say, but must submit: to leave him he considers impossible; but to approve him, in this apparent imprudence, he seems to have found difficult to his mind. There was a want of simplicity, likewise, in the fears that he expressed. Jesus had told him the purpose for which he was going. In this he had declared himself the Lord of life and the Destroyer of death. With such a Lord there was every reason to look for safety, and to have believed that no powers on earth or hell could compass the destruction of Jesus' life, unless he should voluntarily surrender it. Even had Thomas at that time believed the covenant plan which called for this willing sacrifice, the

hour was not yet come in which it was to be given ; and the soul of this disciple was exceedingly defective in simplicity, when thus admitting inordinate fears and human reasonings. There was also a culpable ignorance of his own weakness, and a confidence in his heart as able and willing to be faithful, so that he speaks as if he could manfully face the danger, and meet the death that he anticipated ;—a power which, alas ! was soon lacking in them all ! In his observation made to Christ, respecting *the way*, we discover the same character. There is a kind of *fretfulness* in his complaint of ignorance, with an intimation that he considered Christ as acting with reserve in not being more explicit. He never thinks of charging himself with dulness, or of lamenting that, after so many discourses and lessons from his lips, he should still require further instruction : but with distempered emotion, turns his observations against the Lord, not indeed by a direct charge—love and respect reined this feeling—but evidently with a secretly indulged discontent. He had had sufficient opportunity for *full* information. Jesus had constantly, and in various ways, spoken of his departure to the Father, and had taught his followers how they should follow him. The fault therefore rested in Thomas, as slow to learn, dull of apprehension, and unapt to receive truths which were thus sublime and spiritual. This ignorance and corruption was more fearfully developed in the scenes succeeding Christ's crucifixion. He had along with the rest deserted his Lord in the garden ; but he seems to have fallen into a worse state of temptation afterwards. For, judging by the natural turn of mind he had shewn in his discipleship during Christ's presence, and by the spirit he demonstrated when he was informed of the resurrection, we may reasonably suppose that his absence from the little company was not

accidental. It is clear that his faith respecting the person of Christ had received a terrible shock ; and he appears to have yielded to a frightful degree of unbelief, leading to a comparative indifference to the fellowship and society of the disciples. He stood on the brink of a precipice, and bordered on apostasy ; and it seems as if it had been suggested to his mind to consider the whole as a delusion, and the disciples as visionaries. If this were not the state of his mind, we can scarcely account for the violence, obstinacy, and presumption of his speech, in which there was the expression of total disbelief of one of the great articles of faith inculcated by Christ, an intimation that he considered it an impossibility, and an entire discredit of the witness of ten men combined with the other witnesses of which no doubt he had heard, and all this with such a want of due respect or affection to them, that it is evident his spirit was in complete disorder and woful temptation. Mortified affection might have much to do with this frame of mind : he had hoped and looked for much in and from his Master ; these expectations had been carnal and earthly, and were in consequence disappointed : he was now ready to quarrel with any or every thing, and violently to tear from his heart the remembrance of him from whom he felt as if all his present griefs proceeded. In the midst of these conflicting emotions, however, love was not extinct, neither could Thomas wholly sever himself from the disciples ; he was found with them on the succeeding sacred day, and, by an unexpected act of grace on the part of the Lord, delivered out of the sea of tempestuous feeling, and brought to the peaceful shore of assurance and rest. Yet not without attendant shame consequent upon his unbelief, and the conscious sense which he must at that moment have felt of the extent of his provocation

and sin. He was made a monument of that truth which the Lord keepeth for his people, and by which they are saved from the ruin which their own perverseness would procure. He was rescued ere he launched into further extremes of desperation, and found the succouring power and mercy of his Saviour. The descending Comforter rested upon him in the day of Pentecost, confirming him with enlarged gifts and graces ; and thenceforward he became the bold, faithful, and loving confessor of that resurrection, and the glory of that power which he had before misunderstood or denied.

From the history of Thomas, we are taught the powerful and acceptable nature of true love, and how essential it is to the possession of faith in Jesus' name. It is the affection which, amidst innumerable infirmities, knits the soul to Jesus, and which sheds a fragrancy through discipleship, which is as a sweet savour to him. Without it our most costly sacrifices are cold and unmeaning forms ; with it our feeblest steps are contemplated with gracious sympathy from the Lord. Yet, even love, however honest and true, needs to be constantly put upon its legitimate expression, otherwise it will degenerate or be defiled, for our hearts are not only disposed to the more palpable offences belonging to a fallen nature, but are capable of mingling in our most refined affections that which is evil. Strength of affection is usually attended with a quickness of sensibility, that takes alarm at reserve, that murmurs when the object beloved does not in all things do as *we* conceive right, and which under any violent mortification, is disposed to act and speak in a spirit and tone very unworthy the subject that has occasioned it. We know this in our natural connexions ; and as the devotion of a sinner to Christ, is love sanctified to its highest exercise, and fixed on the supreme object, who is LOVE, it

will, so long as we are in the body, lie exposed to these evil mixtures. This is quite evident in the various exercises through which believers pass, and wherein they are sometimes tempted to complain, murmur, and speak as inconsistently as the Apostle Thomas. We are naturally impatient for such manifestations of the divine government, and of the divine love to our own souls, as shall satisfy *us* that all is right, and that we are not deceived in our hopes ; and should the Lord *cross* these expectations, we too frequently fall into a discontent with *him*, instead of looking for the just cause of his dealings. Alas ! in how many distressing instances has this temptation prevailed to bring the poor soul even to the brink of Apostacy, causing a dissatisfaction in the society of saints, or loss of relish for the means of grace, a sullen preference for solitude, gloomy doubts of all that was formerly felt or believed, and a proud or affected indifference to the words of invitation, or the counsels of the flock. In such cases our love for Christ has partaken too much of mere natural feeling, and has not been sufficiently fed by spiritual apprehension of truth received and digested in the soul. And as a prevention to these evils, we should strenuously endeavour to obtain increased knowledge of Christ's glory, of the nature of spiritual discipleship, and of the dependance of our souls upon the operation of the Holy Ghost ; not only to impart the heavenly grace, but to keep that grace in its legitimate and sacred exercise. By the divine power of the Spirit, we shall be enabled to use the words of Thomas with a better spirit than his, saying, we will go with him to die with him, as *strengthened* and *enabled* by him : we shall learn to be satisfied with his determinations whatever they be, although possibly we understand them not ; and blessed be the Lord, we shall feel to our consolation and

joy, that we know whither Christ is gone, and the way. To a soul dependant, and pleading for the teachings of the Lord, full and gracious answers will be given ; and faith will trace the glory of Messiah in his ascent to the eternal throne, and will confide in him to bring the soul into an experimental knowledge of the power of his death and resurrection, and of the mansions prepared at God's right hand.

There is no temptation against which we should more carefully guard, than that of negligence in appointed means of grace. Whenever this occurs, we may be sure it originates in some sin in the heart, which ought instantly to be detected and crucified. We never can carelessly or willingly absent ourselves from the assembling together of God's worshipping believing people, without *losing* something, and also inducing some evil. As these are the seasons wherein Jesus appears in the midst of his saints, we, by not being with them, miss the revelation : we have lost some information, some visit of the Spirit, some conviction, or some comfort. The report of others who have been there is not satisfactory, and does not reach the heart with that particular power which was present in the assembly ; and not unfrequently it finds the soul indisposed to *receive* the report, pre-occupied by the business or pleasure which prevented the attendance, or too indolent to exercise lively energies of understanding ; and perhaps too unbelieving to credit half or any thing of what is said ; something of mischief, or loss, or injury is invariably the result. Therefore we ought to arrange all our avocations in such a way, as shall not interfere with this positive and chief duty ; we ought to stir up our naturally procrastinating disposition to resolution, lest we are ensnared by indolence and insincerity ; and if we are in any measure already tinctured with doubts, discontent,

or despondency, there is the more absolute necessity for the exertion, if we would escape the miseries entailed on an unequal profession or doubting state of mind. If we will not be advised, we shall receive correction ; for notwithstanding Christ's unchangeable love, he will rebuke us for sin ; and has terrible ways in which to shew us that it is a bitter thing to grieve the Comforter.

Let us be animated by these revelations to tread in the path of diligent devotion, with humility, and with a teachable soul. In this disposition we may lovingly search and look into those sacred wounds which were inflicted for us. The pierced hands and feet, and opened side of him we love, are sights on which the eye of faith delights to rest. Fain would our souls enter, even into them, as into the refuge and shelter from the storm ; and sweet and sacred are those moments of high ecstasy, combined with moaning penitence, wherein whilst thus looking on Jesus, we with heartfelt understanding exclaim, " My Lord and my God !" Thus let us muse until the fire burn ; and thus *appropriate* the sacrifice as our all in all.

PRAYER.

Most blessed and Almighty God, increase our faith, we humbly beseech Thee, in these our approaches unto Thee : and O do Thou, in infinite mercy, enlarge every affection we have for the reception of the truth as it is in Jesus. O that we may experience from Thee, gracious God, those visitations which draw forth the fervent confidence of the soul in Thee. We pray Thee to take possession of us wholly and entirely, and to centre every desire of our hearts in Thyself. Since it pleases Thee so graciously to accept the poor offerings which sinners bring, and since the love

of hearts such as ours is not despised by Thee, O encourage us to bring Thee what we have, and let it be the fruit of Thy sanctifying grace. We ask for the indwelling Holy Ghost, who alone creates the acceptable affections of the heart, and by whom alone those affections are maintained in genuine exercise ; grant us this blessing, O Jesus Christ, and help us so to root our desires in Thee, that nothing may separate or awaken doubts in our heart. Fill us with a humble and entire satisfaction in all Thy dispensations : Lord, make us to know Thee as Thou art in Thy nature and offices, as God and Lord ; and pour forth into our minds such views of Thy glory, as may render us contented and waiting and peaceful in all situations. O do not allow temptation to prevail against us in any form. Keep us with our thoughts and affections elevated and heavenly, and may we delight in Thee as our appropriated Lord and God, trusting Thee at all times as our refuge and home. And may we meditate upon Thee as crucified for us, constantly looking to those precious wounds which were inflicted upon Thee, and realizing the sorrows of thy soul, until we increase in all the pure devotion of faith and gratitude, glorifying Thee by a life of never-ceasing service. O Thou dear and only Saviour, bless us with Thy love, comfort us in Thy peace, and be to us the joy and salvation of our souls ; delivering us from infirmity, and saving us from defilement by unbelief. O hear us graciously for Thy mercies' sake. Amen.

BARTHOLOMEW, OR NATHANAEL.

Matt. x. 3. Mark iii. 18. Luke vi. 14.

John i. 45—50.

ST. MATTHEW, in recording the names of the twelve apostles, places Bartholomew after Philip, of whom we read no more by this name, excepting only in the parallel passages of Mark and Luke, where the appointment of the twelve is recorded; and in Acts i. 13, where the apostles are assembled together. On this account the character of Bartholomew would not have demanded a particular attention in this course of subjects; but that, by many, he is supposed to be the same as Nathanael. The reasons upon which this supposition is founded, are, first, that St. John never mentions Bartholomew amongst the apostles, but particularly notices Nathanael, especially on that remarkable occasion when the Lord appeared to them after his resurrection, John xxi. 2; and that the other evangelists are equally silent respecting Nathanael: and secondly, because Philip and Bartholomew, *or* Philip and Nathanael, are always put together in commission. Concluding them to be the same person, it is supposed, that as Peter is sometimes called *Bar-Jonah*, or son of Jonas, so Nathanael is *Bar-Tolmai*, or son of Tolmai, that is Bar-Tholomew. Upon this question we must be left to the determination of our own judgment; but in the present portion we treat upon the character, as concluding that they are the same person.

Nathanael was a Galilean, having his residence in Cana, a small town in that region. He was apparently an intimate friend of Philip's; and, as we read, was first sought after by this disciple,

immediately after his own call to the faith of the gospel. Philip found him in a solitary place, sitting under a fig-tree, and instantly addressed him with the intelligence of his joyful discovery of Messias, to which, as we have already seen, he received from his friend an answer full of doubt and prejudice. He was however prevailed upon to accompany him to Jesus, and met a gracious reception; for our Lord, seeing him approach, testified of his approved integrity, declaring him to be an Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile. Such a salutation intimated previous knowledge; and Nathanael, being assured that hitherto he was an entire stranger to Jesus, expressed his surprise; but our Lord speedily demonstrated to him that he had a power of intimate perception into his character and circumstances, of which those around him were little aware, and shewed him, that, whilst he was sitting under the fig-tree, and before that Philip had addressed him, his omniscient eye looked upon him. This testimony was attended with the power of conviction poured forth upon Nathanael's mind, and with utmost amazement, reverence, and faith, he exclaimed, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel!" Jesus accepted the tribute, at the same time assuring him of future enlarged visions of his glory. After this period, Nathanael remained a steadfast follower of the Lord, and a true witness of him whom he thus believingly confessed.

Nathanael's spirit was evidently under very gracious preparation for this manifestation of the Son of God. Much is conveyed in that short sentence of approval which fell from Jesus' lips—"An Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile!" The two prominent excellencies contained in such a character are prayerful wrestlings and pure

simplicity. A true Israelite ; one who justifies this appellation, is a man in whose spirit there abideth importunity and princely pleadings with God ; and, as possessed by a Hebrew, includes the spiritual perception and expectation of all those promises made to Abraham's race in the great Redeemer. A man without guile is one who receives and professes this revelation without hypocrisy, honestly accepting the spiritual testimony, uprightly confessing it, and exercising faith without the mixture of that corrupt leaven of earthliness, human traditions, and self-righteousness, which is the bane and destruction of the merely nominal believer. And this upright disposition in a Jew was one consistent with the proper character of such as were favoured with the oracles of God, and demonstrated the grace by which, amidst prevalent corruption of an awful extent in the nation, this soul was kept free. It is most probable that Nathanael was engaged in the very exercises marking this character, when he sat beneath the shade of the fig-tree. He, as a praying believer, knew the sweets of solitude, and there could commune with his God, far from the busy scenes of life, and delighting in the fellowship of the Spirit, and as a true Israelite looked to the *promise*. And, as the minds of men in general were at that period exercised in anxious expectation of the appearance of the Deliverer, it is most likely that his meditations turned upon this interesting theme, and his prayers might be directed for the accomplishment of this divine purpose ; and the offering had been acceptable to Him before whom, as now incarnate, he was quickly to stand. The spirit evinced by this believer, when brought into the presence of Christ, accords with our idea of that effect which must ever follow conscious integrity. He was not *elated* by the commendation which our Lord bestowed : instead of being puffed

up with a vainglorious satisfaction, at being thus approved before so many witnesses, his thoughts were at once diverted from himself to the wonderful knowledge of him who addressed him. Yet he did not *refuse* the witness; he had reason to hope that it was just; he had the Spirit's testimony in the inward man, that he walked uprightly with his God; it would have been false, and contrary to real humility, to have denied this fact; and he accepted the words of Jesus as spoken unfeignedly. These were great excellencies, and were mercifully received by our Lord, as the fruits of a truly regenerate state. Not that his soul was without any mixture of evil, which might justly have caused divine displeasure. One effect of a fallen nature he displayed in this short history; for although we admire and approve the candour and teachableness which triumphed over prejudice, he *had* the prejudice, and was naturally disposed, on this ground, to exclude from his mind all thoughts of Jesus, or salvation by him. Let us not for an instant imagine, that Nathanael trusted for acceptance in his own guileless character; had this been his spirit, he would not have been an *Israelite indeed*. This appellation sufficiently decides the question, as with us it is enough to say of a Christian or disciple, a Christian *indeed*, in order to convey that we mean one who takes the revelation of Jesus, *as it is*, receiving all its doctrine, and practically exhibiting its power. Believers in the Old Testament period had the same faith with us; and this man, as embracing the true faith of Israel, renounced his own righteousness as filthy rags, Isa. lxiv. 6. and looked for acceptance according to the *one* rule laid down in revelation, through the great Propitiation, Isa. liii. 1—12. Of Nathanael, therefore, we conclude, that he was already a regenerate man, delighting in God, loving communion, walking uprightly, looking for

Messiah, and that all which he needed was, like some others living in that period, the manifestation that what he believed and looked for was all accomplished in *Jesus of Nazareth*. Notwithstanding the prejudice which infected his mind, he was quickly liberated from all remaining doubts; and when he accepted the evidence of Christ's omniscient knowledge of him, in consequence of which he believed him to be the Messiah, he evinced that *his* expectations in this glorious Person were scriptural, and that he looked for the Son of God, the King of Israel, Messiah, as the Omniscient, Omnipresent Jehovah. This Holy One he now confessed with all his heart and soul; and in every after-step gave full proof that he had without guile exclaimed, Rabbi, Master; for he submitted to the rule of this his heavenly King, kissed his sceptre, and rejoiced in his sway.

The dealings of the Holy Spirit in the vessels of mercy are very much varied, although they all conduct to the same blessed result. We have a striking example of this in the several characters under our observation. In each we behold the irresistible energy of the Holy Ghost, casting down all opposition to the kingdom of Messiah, and setting up his reign in the heart. But the methods used to this end were very much varied, and prove to us how infinite are all his resources, who can bring forth his invincible weapons, and distribute his designs in triumph, when and as he will. The example of Nathanael may be very encouraging to those who pass through the gradual operations of grace. We learn hereby the faithfulness of that God who begins the good work in us; and how he will not leave the subject on whom he is acting, until he has fully accomplished all that is necessary to salvation. Sometimes we are led by a process, in which the knowledge of our Lord is

imparted by little and little ; and this is frequently the case, where persons have from their youth been placed under the sound of the gospel testimony, or are trained up in the regular observance of certain ordinances, reading, &c. Through these channels the understanding gradually emerges from the midnight state of nature, and comes into the influence of brighter beams ; and very commonly we meet with believers of this description, who are in possession of solid scriptural views, who walk in all orderly conformity to what they know and believe to be truth, and who so hang their hope on the promise in Christ, that all their addresses to the throne of God are through him ; and their affections also are so far influenced, that they love the hour of prayer, and delight to meditate on him. Yet, with all these privileges and blessings, there may be a want of that clearness of appropriation in the riches of Christ, by which the heart is made to glow with sacred fervour : there may be the want of that personal revelation of the Lord, made to the inner man, which is attended with the enlarged sense of the nature of discipleship, as calling to a course wherein the cross is borne with Jesus. And it may be understood by many, perhaps, who read these pages, when they look to themselves or others, as in the state of Nathanael *before* his interview with Christ personally, that they have to aim at the higher degree of experience he possessed *afterwards*. Of many disciples of Jesus it might be said, as of Nathanael, What lack they yet? They believe, they serve, they pray, they read *uprightly* and without guile, loving the way of integrity ; and yet it is evident to themselves and others, that there is a want of a certain high tone of feeling and service, which is exhibited in others. The fact is they want closer and more personal interviews with Christ ; they should draw nearer in

their contemplation of him as incarnate, and should realize more habitually his *omniscient constant* presence, as ever hearing him say, "*I see thee!*" It is by this holy familiarity with our Lord, as ever with us, that we obtain that elevation of experience and character, for which every disciple should be solicitous; and which enriches the soul in a degree beyond the conception of any who have not individually known what it is to stand in spirit before Jesus, as beholding him in nearest access to his presence, and as hearing him speak in words of gracious complacent peace to our souls. Then it is that we exclaim with the fervour of faith, Rabbi, Master! Thou art the Son of God! Thou art the King of Israel!

The revelation of Christ in these clearer visions, will sometimes be given, through means, where perhaps we have least expected the blessing. Prayer, and direct appeals to him, are the chief medium through which the spirit of revelation is imparted to the mind. But frequently we are conducted into this disposition by other helps, such as, the counsel of friends, and of those especially who have themselves made the experiment. Sometimes also, in places and situations where we have been accustomed to believe no good thing could exist, the Lord peculiarly dwells, and will peculiarly be found; for he is pleased to choose for himself, independently of the opinions of men, where he will reside, and how he will give his blessings. In order to rebuke the prejudice and pride of our nature, it frequently is His will to acknowledge things most despised, and instruments the most unlikely to the purpose of conveying the knowledge of himself. And many a disciple of his has been prevailed upon to come and see, making the experiment or inquiry for themselves, in places, and amongst people, against whom they had indulged a prejudice; and *there*

have received the very blessing which they least expected. The clearing of their views, the decision of their hearts, the more spiritual profession of the faith, thus giving glory to God, who in his own sovereignty will work, and none shall let it. This example of Nathanael should therefore be very serviceable to us, in teaching us to check the naturally rash judgment we are disposed to exercise and express, and in all things to deal with candour, not condemning what we have not examined, not pronouncing that impossible or improbable, which the experience of others has proved to be true, but yielding teachably to the power of evidence, and honestly giving ourselves to a fair investigation of what is represented, before we reject or close our heart and ear to the testimony. Living as we do amidst such *misrepresentation*, surrounded as we are by those who judge from report, or private motives, and liable as we are to prejudice, and almost universally to judge on the *unfavourable* side, we ought to feel it a positive duty as christians, or as persons professing to be actuated by honourable and just sentiments, to guard against these injurious influences, and especially in such things as relate to the person, kingdom, work, and workers of Jesus, we should always strive to ascertain truth by a personal investigation, before we utter our sentiments or form our opinion.

In an especial manner let us cultivate the habit and love of retirement, seeking occasions when we may exclude the world, and commune in spirit with the Lord. Jesus is always with us : there is no solitude that will shut him out from our hearts, or hide us from his eye. This is a solemn, but an exhilarating thought. And as it is calculated to fill us with watchfulness in society, so is it to fill us with delight when we sit and muse upon his ways, or walk and meditate upon his grace, or lift

the silent ejaculatory prayer in the inner man, or are engaged in the duties which belong to our lot when no human eye is near. O how unutterably precious is the recollection that our Lord's eye is upon us, and that in going out or coming in, he is ever around our path, and contemplateth the expression, the act of love and faith. Were this *believed* by us with *power*, it would be an incentive to the most industrious improvement of every moment to his praise, and would render our seasons of retirement unutterably dear and profitable. The Lord is pleased to give us, sometimes, after testimonies, that he has seen us, as full as his words to Nathanael ; his answers to our prayer, his increased revelation of himself, corresponding with what we have been sighing for ; and the divine influence of his Spirit upon our walk, and conversation, are demonstrations that he saw and heard us. In these we should rejoice, accepting them as living tokens of his mercy and glory, and as confirmation to our faith and hope. Thus let us improve the examples presented us in the saints of old, using all revelation for the furtherance of our simplicity and devotion.

PRAYER.

MOST blessed and gracious Lord, we humbly ask the visits of thy love ; and now would receive from Thee those heavenly testimonies, which abound in the name of Jesus, our only and eternal friend. O come in the Spirit's mighty power and grace, fulfilling Thy promise never to leave nor forsake us ; and grant that we may live in that high fellowship which enriches the soul in Thee. We beseech Thee to impress upon our hearts the constant recollection that we live under the notice of Thine eye ; and make this conviction so strong

within us, that it may be instrumental in calling forth the most lively, sacred and endeared devotion to Thee ; so that, in all situations, we may feel the privilege of living with Thee as our present friend. O give us that unction, resting upon the mind, which prepares it for every holy delight in Thee our God ; and make us to possess the testimony of redeeming love in Almighty power. We would know Thee, O Saviour, as our Lord and master, as the Son of God and King of Israel. In this Thy glory we would love to worship, call upon, and serve Thee. O give us power to fulfil these desires, and to consecrate our all to Thy blessed name. We ask Thee to make us Israelites indeed in the spiritual sense of these words, filling us with a wrestling princely spirit that prevails with Thee. We pray Thee to make us without guile, filling us with spiritual integrity, and causing us to walk uprightly in Thy ways. And since these are blessings only to be possessed in the grace of regeneration, and never to be manifested by sinful man, but as he is the subject of Thy mercy and upholding care, we pray Thee to impart the increase of all Thy compassions to us, that we may verify these distinctions, and know Thee to be our Redeeming Lord. Blessed Saviour, with these prayers we unite our praises : we bless Thee for Thy goodness, and patience, and love already dispensed to our souls ; and confess that Thou art a gracious Lord, plenteous in mercy and loving kindness ; O receive our offering for Thy Name's sake. Amen.

JAMES THE SON OF ALPHEUS.

Matt. x. 3.

JAMES, the son of Alpheus, became a very prominent character in the gospel history, and presents us with some interesting and instructive particulars. He was connected with Christ by human ties, being as is supposed, his cousin, called according to the style of those times his brother ; see Matt. xiii. 55 ; the Virgin Mary and the wife of Alpheus, or Cleopas, being sisters. James was first a disciple, and afterwards appointed as one of the apostles, evidently continuing in association with Christ to the end of our Lord's ministry on earth. The principal scene of this apostle's labours, after the ascension of Christ, was in Jerusalem. Here he resided as the chief director of Christian affairs ; being high in estimation with the church, as a man of sound and extensive wisdom and judgment ; from whose advice believers were glad to receive aid. He was also much respected by the unconverted Jews, and surrounding nations ; and from the remarkable integrity of his character received the surname of *Just*. He is frequently mentioned in the course of the sacred volume : In Acts xii. 17. as affectionately remembered by Peter with a message of consolation : In Acts xv. 13. as speaking in council upon an important question agitating the church : In Acts xxi. 18. as giving advice to Paul upon a matter of supposed expediency : In Gal. i. 19. as visited by Paul at Jerusalem : In Gal. ii. 9. as expressing his hearty concurrence in the appointment of Paul to the Gentiles. He is likewise the author of the general epistle bearing his name ; which he addressed to

the scattered brethren ; and which was written shortly before his death.

The eminent respect paid to James did not secure him from persecution ; his very excellence drew on him the envious and resentful malice of the Jews ; who, perceiving his great influence, began to dread its extent and effects. They therefore resolved, if possible to effect his destruction. This they at length produced by a stratagem. Festus, the governor of Judea, being dead, and his successor not arrived, they seized this interim of liberty as a favourable opportunity for effecting their bloody designs ; and Ananias, the High Priest, caused James to be apprehended. He represented to him that the effect of his doctrines was ruinous to the people, who were almost universally persuaded to believe in Jesus, and that he was therefore required on pain of death to remove this impression from the public mind, so far as his influence extended. It was further stated to him, that an opportunity for this testimony was provided for him, which it was expected he should embrace. Accordingly James was carried to one of the galleries of the temple, and commanded to address the people from thence, testifying his opinion of Jesus. James, as the Jews had expected, was true to his Lord, and with a loud voice preached to the people the salvation in Jesus. He was instantly precipitated from the height, and in his fall was greatly bruised. Seeing he was not dead, certain conspirators engaged for this purpose rushed in upon him, and beat out his brains with a club, whilst a shower of stones was thrown upon him by those who stood near. Thus he closed his interesting, laborious, and useful career, as a faithful witness of Christ crucified, and was numbered with the army of martyrs.

This James was styled "*the less*," either on account of his stature or age ; being by this

appellation distinguished from James the brother of John, who was styled "the greater or elder."

There is little of any *special* import in the life of James previously to Christ's ascension; for in the period of his association with our Lord, he partook in common with the rest of the disciples of the lot of his master, and like them was called by an act of grace, advanced into office by the Lord's will, faithful in the general state of his affections, clouded and prejudiced upon some particulars of Christ's kingdom, and involved in the offence of deserting the Lord in the time of his last conflict. What has been observed therefore respecting the rest of the family, in these particulars, is equally applicable to James. In what ensued after the day of Pentecost, there are some things of particular interest in the appointment and character of this apostle.

It is evident that James was exactly fitted for the station he was to occupy in the church, the Holy Spirit endowing him with a remarkable degree of prudence, judgment, and resolution. No situation could be more conspicuous, or more arduous, than to be a chief leader of the Christian church in the midst of *Jerusalem*. Here prejudice, enmity, and bitterest feelings against the crucified Lord and his followers, assumed the most formal and desperate character; and it can only be attributed to the divine presence watching over this precious servant of the Lord, that he so long escaped the fury of the Jews, and was allowed to prosecute his labours with such evident success. We immediately perceive, however, that it required a man of peculiar dispositions to fill this office to the benefit of the church. It was not a situation where any thing of rashness, incaution, or want of well-digested plans and proceedings, could have

been tolerated ; and as a *stationary* labourer, there was also the opportunity for adversaries to exercise a more than usually scrutinizing observation of all his sentiments, works, and ways. Exactly according to these circumstances the Holy Ghost moulded the character of this apostle. He was sober, reflective, patient, and energetic in judgment ; he was also scrupulously and minutely attentive to every thing of good report amongst men ; and in addition to this, he had a more than common degree of zeal for *the Jews*, a remarkable national attachment, and strong affection for the laws of his fathers. All this rendered him the most suitable instrument to work in the heart of the kingdom ; for he was prepared to bear with many things arising out of Jewish prejudices ; and to disarm the malevolent passions of those who sought occasion against the Christians.

The mind of the apostle was not however, closed to the interests of the Gentile world. His own particular calling was to Israel, but he earnestly desired prosperity to the cause in every land and isle, and rejoiced in the appointment of able workers to the heathen. This is clearly demonstrated in his speech in council, Acts xv. wherein we discover sentiments, which were the result of serious reflection and simple faith. He contemplated the work already begun amongst the Gentiles, he called to mind the prophetic testimony with which this work agreed, he elevated his thoughts to the eternal counsels ascribing to Jehovah the sovereign right of disposing his own interests, and the infinite foreknowledge of an eternal mind. These were considerations satisfactory and conclusive to his own judgment, respecting the Gentiles. He, however, expressed a holy solicitude for the maintaining of sanctity amongst the Gentile converts ; and recommended an attention to the feelings of the Jews, who had

in every city those who still preached Moses, enforcing the law of ceremonies ; and who would be greatly offended were Christians to use their liberty without attention to some parts of the ceremonial law, and which in some instances believers might concede without danger to the fundamental doctrines of the cross. He therefore sought to enforce, along with the absolute requirement of moral sanctity, the exercise of charity towards those amongst whom they dwelt. There seems to have been, notwithstanding the enlarged views of the apostle, an *over* anxious care for the Jews, as it respected their prejudices ; this led him to give advice to Paul which savoured of a *temperizing* spirit, and which was not successful ; see Acts xxi. 18—29. His zeal for Israel carried him beyond the line of just judgment. It was not that he wished to escape persecution, or that Paul should not bear the reproach of the cross, but he wished to *recommend* the faith as not opposed to the interests of the Jews, thinking hereby to remove prejudices, and to win an attention to the Christian cause. The affection of his heart was honestly towards the furtherance of the cause of truth ; but he erred in supposing that by such concessions the humbling requirements of the cross would be made more palatable ; and the Lord was pleased to correct the error by the tumult and disorder which he allowed against Paul *for* this very concession. His whole life, writings, and death, sufficiently prove that he shrunk not from the reproach of Jesus of Nazareth. He openly and boldly bore the cross, and died for the name of his Saviour ; glorying in him who was rejected of men, and yielding himself to the murderer with a cheerful readiness to shed his blood in the cause of the gospel of life. His was a settled, determined, and consistent profession. In the act therefore wherein he erred, it was a mistake of judgment,

arising out of excessive solicitude for truth ; and serves to shew us that “ there is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not ;” and that in the very possession for which a man is most excellent and eminent, he is capable of committing great inconsistencies.

From the epistle of James we may gather some information respecting his private feelings and individual character ; every separate chapter containing something which throws light upon these particulars. In the first he evinces a tender sympathy for the afflicted, a deep sense of the nature of temptation, and a spiritual understanding of the benefit resulting from sanctified trials. In the second chapter we trace a holy humility of soul, with a disdain of the dying distinctions of this perishing world, as unworthy the estimation of an heir of glory. He manifests a comprehensive and spiritual understanding of the law, and of its ordained end, and of the spiritual power of the saints to walk in love and holy obedience. In the third chapter, he shews his knowledge of the power of corruption, the need of watchfulness, and the duty of exhibiting a life that corresponds with the profession of being new created in Christ. In the fourth chapter, his sense of the destroying defiling nature of the world, with the absolute requirement of God that his people decidedly separate from it, and that our present state of exposure calls for dependance, and a sanctified recollection and use of the *transitory* condition of all human things, and of life itself. In the fifth chapter, his awful sense of coming judgment upon the licentious rich oppressors of the earth, with the provision which the covenant has made for the strong consolation of all who suffer affliction as the children of God.

In these passages, we have traits of a character under the powerful operations of the Holy Ghost,

not only as one inspired to give counsel to others, but as speaking out of an experimental heart, wherein the truths he proclaimed were known, appropriated, and used in all practical power. Thus we number James amongst the most eminent saints and most distinguished witnesses, deriving to this moment precious help and instruction through him, as the Spirit's appointed instrument to deliver the mind of God.

We may select a few of the most prominent parts of his history for our own particular edification.

The manifestation of the Lord's faithful power and grace, in fitting his instruments for his work, should impart to each of us great consolation, and awaken simple dependance. We may be persuaded, that if we are the Lord's *brethren*, his own redeemed and allied ones, he will never leave us without the proportion of grace which our station in the mystical body demands. No consideration can be more cheering to us than this, in the midst of our several duties and occupations; and we ought to realize it, with a grateful recumbency upon the promises; for thus we are kept in diligence and peace. *Diligence* will follow, when we are persuaded that our Lord has ordained our lot; and *peace* will accompany us, when we believe that in that lot he will magnify his own sufficiency in us. However poor, despised, or unworthy we may be, our names are written in his heart, our paths are ordered by his counsel, and he will acknowledge us by spiritual distinctions and impartations. There are some stations which have a more than ordinary responsibility annexed to them; and some situations, where we are more conspicuously exhibited before men than many of our fellow-believers. So far from *disowning* this, or closing our eye to the truth, we should open our under-

standing, and intently contemplate the reality of these things, that we may be aware of our great dependance upon the Lord for the plenitude of his grace, and be alert to the use of that grace which unquestionably will be ours in its rich and needed proportion. Our course as Christians should be marked by those excellencies which we discover in Jesus. Since we are objects on whom the public eye is fixed, we should be scrupulously attentive to every thing which relates to our dealings amongst men ; knowing that by these things the world forms its estimate of our pretensions. On the subject of moral rectitude, men quite destitute of discernment into the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, are capable of some just judgment, and understand that a high profession of religion necessarily demands a high walk in rectitude of principle. The Christian cause has suffered more from the inconsistency or carelessness of professors in this duty, than by any other means ; for men seize upon the slightest flaw in the conduct of one who is deemed a saint, and charge it upon the whole body, without hesitation or discrimination. We must know this, if we have any acquaintance with human life ; and that, from the lowest servant to the highest rank in the world, the great question of the religion of Jesus is agitated, through the exhibition made of it in its professors. If we love the cause, we shall receive these considerations, and be humbly solicitous to have affixed to our names the appellation of *just*. Not that we shall ever escape the malignant tongue of envy, and the malicious hatred of those who abhor spirituality. Our general character may be respectable and respected, whilst our Christian principles are the subject of aversion ; and, in some instances, our very consistency will provoke the increased secret indignation of opposers. For this we must stand prepared, with a holy satisfaction, that the perse-

cution has not been on the ground of personal transgression. "Let none of us suffer as a murderer, or thief, or busy body, &c ; but if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but glorify God on this behalf."

In our greatest privileges and gifts we are always under the necessity of exercising a spirit of watchfulness, especially against excess in our attachment to any particular line of labour, followed either by ourselves or others. Without this vigilance upon the movements of our heart, we are in danger of becoming partial, and of circumscribing our influence, or of wishing for concessions to our own favourite pursuit, that may prove injurious to the general interests of the body. In such cases natural feeling defiles our zeal, and our simplicity is impaired. This evil is constantly exhibited amongst persons engaged zealously in promoting institutions, sunday schools, societies, &c. They are frequently too exclusively interested in their *own* concerns or line of duty ; and would have it preserve a pre-eminence, or receive the concessions of others. This error is very great, producing disorder sometimes where peace is *professedly* in view, and arising out of the absence of that enlargement of mind and judgment, which should make the Christian embrace his *Master's* interests wherever they are the subject of labour. Let us then pray over and watch *our zeal*, that it may be cleansed from the foul mixtures of nature, and flow in a pure channel, seeking in simplicity the promotion of the kingdom of Jesus our Lord. And never let us yield to an unhallowed solicitude, which might tempt us to concede, where we ought to be independent and firm.

PRAYER.

Most blessed and gracious Lord, it is from Thee alone that the soul derives those communications which render it consistent, and elevate it to the true standard of the Christian life; and whilst we ascribe the glory to Thee, we come to supplicate for the blessing to ourselves. O in Thy great condescension and love behold us, unworthy as we are of high distinctions; and endow us with such honours, as raise the soul to eminence in the way of grace. It is to these great and imperishable possessions we aspire, wrestling with Thee to give them freely and fully to us. O blessed Saviour, hearken and comply, and impart to us principles which shall rise victorious in every situation we fill. It belongs unto Thee to fix the bounds of our habitation, and to assign us our lot in this world: and we rejoice that all which concerns us, is of Thy appointment. O may we steadfastly love to be dependant upon Thee in all things, and to seek the sufficient strength and blessing of the Holy Ghost, to enable us for labour, for suffering, for honour or dishonour; patiently, prudently, and faithfully maintaining our character, as bearers of the cross, and as *just men*. Enlarge our views of Thy purposes, that whilst we diligently pursue our own line of duty, we may have affections which go forth to the interests of Jesus in every nation and in every heart. Help us to enter with sympathy into the situation of fellow-labourers and fellow-saints, wishing them prosperity in the name of the Lord, and delighting to hear of and behold the rising honour of Jesus in the regions of the earth. And O grant that our holy affections may be under divine regulation, and kept in the exercise of

genuine submission to Thee, that our zeal may be according to knowledge, and offered up as a sacrifice to Thee. Thus guide us, merciful Lord, through this dangerous world; and whatever may be our experience from men, enable us to maintain integrity, as the saints and servants of the Lord, to Thy eternal glory. Amen.

JUDE, OR LEBBEUS, WHOSE SURNAME
WAS THADDEUS.

Matt. x. 3. *

OF this Apostle we have little scriptural information ; yet he demands our attention on some interesting accounts. He is distinguished by many names. His own original name seems to have been simply Judas, as recorded in Matthew xiii. 55 ; for he is the same person as is there introduced to us, being the brother of James the less ; and so, of course, equally related to Christ by human ties. In Luke vi. 16. and John xiv. 22, he is mentioned by his own proper name. The names by which he is described in Matthew are supposed to have been given him by way of distinction from Judas the traitor, as Lebbeus and Thaddeus signify '*heartly*,' or '*cordial*.' We know that he fulfilled what these epithets intimate, as belonging to his character ; for although his profession partook of the general features belonging to our Lord's little family, being a course of love mingled with *infirmity*, we find him like the rest rendered victorious through the Spirit's descending grace and power, and remaining a faithful witness to the gospel unto death. It is generally supposed that he died by martyrdom ; but we have no certainty on this point. He appears to have reached an advanced age, and to have out-lived his brother and the rest of the Apostles, excepting John. His Epistle is said to have been written in the year of our Lord 66. We are indebted to his Epistle for the chief features discoverable in his character. He is not mentioned in the gospels with any particularity ; excepting in one record, wherein he puts to our Lord the inter-

esting question of how he would manifest himself to his disciples in a way distinct and different from his revelation to the world? To which inquiry Jesus gave a consolatory and full reply. See John xiv. 22.

The question which Jude put to our Lord, arose from affections of anxious desire to apprehend the full meaning of the gracious words to which he attentively listened; they were evidently words of loving inquiry, demonstrating that he was intent upon receiving spiritual information, and had yielded his mind and heart to Christ as his heavenly teacher. Yet they betray a great degree of remaining ignorance, respecting the nature of those internal spiritual revelations, which so peculiarly belong to the life that is in Christ; and, of that broad line of separation between the saint and the world, of which Jesus had faithfully told them. Our blessed Lord, however, did not *rebuke* the inquirer; he graciously discriminated between *slowness* to learn, and *perverseness* in learning; and therefore patiently bore with this infirmity, and tenderly imparted increased and clearer information.

The affections of Jude were evidently firm and tender; and when we consider the advanced age in which he wrote his Epistle, we may conceive that his powers of mind must have been naturally strong and vigorous. There is a peculiar force and energy in the style; and the boldness of the spirit displayed in his direct and awful charges evinces a vigour of courage of estimable extent; since he had before him the example of his martyred brethren, and must have been fully aware of the spirit of rage and persecution, which was likely to break out against himself, as the reprover of sinners. He seems to have had a tender and high estimation of his brother James, speaking in the first verse of his Epistle of his relation to him, with an evident

respect of his memory, and delight in the relative connexion subsisting between them ; and he manifests somewhat of a kindred mind and disposition, writing with an authoritative force, and, as he intimates, after much thought and deliberation ; it seeming to him *needful* so to address the church. In the discharge of this duty he was faithful, his exhortations being full of earnest zeal, both for the glory of Christ and the prosperity of the church, arising out of a deep and sacred persuasion of his responsibility, as *a servant of Jesus Christ* ; see verse 1. An attentive examination of his short Epistle will impress us with some clear apprehension of the spirit by which he was actuated ; and in this we shall find an interesting occupation.

That he had a comprehensive sense of the awful nature of divine judgments is evidenced, by the view he takes of those national visitations which had been anciently sent to plead the cause of Jehovah, and to avenge the interest of holiness ;— of those tremendous terrors which had been executed upon the fallen spirits ; and of that same vengeance awaiting all the ungodly who pursued the same steps. To these he solemnly reverts, as known in the history of God's past dealings and divine revelations ; and, as a wise master builder, ably applies them to the use of the present necessity, seeking hereby to supply strong motives to the church for vigour and watchfulness. He earnestly exhorts to the holy improvement of privilege, cautions the saints against all corrupt mixtures in themselves or their assemblies ; and shows how much there was a call to present vigilance, on account of the evident declensions now becoming visible, and the heresy, licentiousness, and insubordination that was betrayed by many, who had unawares to the church crept in amongst the members, and would bring in doctrine subversive

of the fundamental articles of faith and gospel practice. Of such as were guilty he writes with a severity belonging to prophetic denunciation, pronouncing woes upon them as fulfilling the fearful marks of reprobacy in their own character; showing them that as they ran in the way of destruction, they would assuredly end in perdition, when the Lord Jesus Christ the only God and Saviour should appear to execute judgment.

Notwithstanding this severity of reproof, St. Jude possessed affections that yearned in tenderness of the most discriminating kind. Well he knew the extent and nature of that free salvation in Jesus, which is the foundation of hope for the most miserable, and the abiding encouragement for persevering labour to the most rebellious. Therefore he affectionately exhorted, that whilst severity was displayed to the haughty and impenitent, compassion should live towards those who might be distinguished as capable of recovery; and that every labour of charity should be prompt and active, in endeavouring to pluck brands from the burning, saving them with a godly fear and jealousy, and demonstrating an abhorrence of even the garment spotted with the flesh. Along with these solemn warnings and practical lessons, he possessed and proclaimed the joyful view of that full, free and mighty redemption, which is built upon Christ the living rock; and although urging to personal efforts, and the use of means in building up the soul in the most holy faith and in keeping it in the love of God; rising to the blessed *source* of the sufficiency and grace, by which the redeemed are kept, and presented faultless before the throne. With his own soul overflowing with divine love, and with a faith elevating his mind into sublimest views of the majesty, dominion, and glory of God our Saviour, he concludes his faithful address; through which he shines forth upon us in the lustre

of an eminent servant, apostle, and lover of Christ ; truly evincing the propriety of his name, *heartly* and *cordial*, his whole energy of life being devoted to this one blessed end.

The improvement which our souls should obtain from the view of this character, will be chiefly gathered out of his Epistle ; yet, the question presented by him to Jesus leads out our meditation, in the first place, to that important subject, which of all others is of the most consequence in our own souls' concerns. There is a peculiar manifestation of Christ made to the regenerate, which is very distinct from that general profession of christianity, with which men are apt to content themselves. After this it is our interest to inquire, and to put the question expressed by Jude with a self-investigating and teachable spirit. If we are really regenerate persons, we have an internal acquaintance with our Lord, which the natural man never obtains, and cannot understand. It is the design of the covenant to impart salvation in the knowledge and possession of an indwelling God, and to reveal Jehovah in his mercies, his judgments, and love, as unveiled, and to be appropriated for an endless portion. In this work of salvation, Jesus triumphantly dispenses the eternal Spirit, whose office it is thus to impart the godhead, as the abiding consolation and life of the soul. Since this is the gospel purpose, it becomes us to inquire, if we have any experience of its grace. Knowing the glorious Jehovah is Jesus, and feeling the healing efficacy of this blessed revelation, should we be privileged as the true disciples of Jesus, it will be an experience most exhilarating to say in answer to our investigation, We know the distinction, we have tasted the peculiar heritage of saints, Jesus has taught us how he manifests himself to us as he does now unto the world. But O with what serious

emotions should we meditate upon this privilege, if we have not the witness that it is ours! and how anxiously renew the inquiry, pressing the Lord to communicate what may be satisfactory, and to clear both our perception and experience upon this point! At once we feel condemned, if we have not this internal distinction, whatever else may be our profession; for whilst destitute of this peculiarity, it is evident we are of the world, although we may have a *name* to live. It is a lamentable condition, for it is the state of one perishing amidst means of safety, and famished whilst the board of plenty is before the eye. The statement of St. Jude in his Epistle may be brought in to aid our reflections upon this important subject. The examples exhibited by the Apostle are selected from the most notorious offenders, and are applied to persons living under the gospel dispensation, and called by the Christian name. They are produced as beacons, warning professors against the crimes which they perpetrated; but more especially designed to direct the attention to the *root* of these evils, as found in the vileness of a natural heart. If we look to these instances, we shall readily discover from what the apparent evils sprang. In Israel, as verse 5th, from ungrateful discontent. In the fallen angels, as verse 6th, from proud ambition. In Sodom, as verse 7th, from a spirit of uncleanness. In Cain, as verse 11th, from deep-seated envy. In Balaam, as verse 11th, from reigning covetousness. In Korah, as verse 11th, from a spirit of insubordination. That these native sins are in us we shall not deny, if we believe the Scriptures, or credit our own experience; and therefore in order to be preserved from the frightful developement of the nature we possess, we must direct our vigilance against the workings of corruption in the heart. It is from this nature that we are so readily overcome by the various temp-

tations which assail us in the world. Temptation acts upon inward lust, and finds that in us with which it assimilates ; and especially such temptations as belong to a spirit of independence. Licentious freedom and vain glory are pleasureable to nature, promising us *liberty*, and boasting of high things. Heretical teachers have a great advantage against us through this indwelling evil. We naturally seize upon novelty. If it comes under the pretence of *ennobling* us, it is the more acceptable ; or if in any degree it promises liberation from painful discipline, subjection to authorities, or any of those restraints imposed on us by the pure gospel, we are disposed to grasp at the proposition, and are likely to be led away from simplicity. It therefore becomes us to obtain a solid and comprehensive view of the Scriptures. To stand prepared for the cunningly-devised fables imposed upon men ; to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints ; and to stand in the midst of the assault as an impregnable fortress. This is not obtained without a knowledge of the word, and an inward vital experience of union with Christ ; since it is thus we receive wisdom and are endowed with power. Let us also seek to have *rooted out* of the heart the spirit of discontent, pride, uncleanness, envy, covetousness, rebellion : and love the gospel which addresses its efficacious power to the destruction of these evils, and which brings us under the yoke of love, “ under the law to Christ.”

In the discharge of that responsibility which is thus laid upon us, we should cultivate the dispositions we discover in the Apostle, uniting severity with meekness. We must contend for the faith, but with spiritual weapons ; railing accusations are perfectly inconsistent with christian dignity or obedience to Christ ; and if the angel railed not, and accused not even the Devil in his malignant

endeavour to oppose the glory of God, how much less should we pour out invectives against fellow-sinners, or deal in any thing which savours of personal abuse. Even in cases of greatest extremity, when contending with most avowed enemies, we shall do well rather to say, "The Lord rebuke thee," than to utter the words of violence, produced as is usually the case from heated passions, or irony or scorn. And here we must incessantly be watching and praying, that if we are placed in the situation of advocating the cause of truth against the spirit of the evil one, we may not ourselves practically demonstrate that we are partakers of his spirit. It is also necessary to preserve this watchfulness, in order to an ability of discrimination; which it is required we should exercise. When we are heated by passion, we forget this act of justice; and instead of following the Apostle's injunction, we make *no* difference, and would *consume* all *in* the fire. But if we are real contenders for *our faith*, we shall preserve an unbiassed and charitable judgment; and in this holy firmness shall readily administer the healing testimony of Jesus, and labour to rescue even those who are perversely rushing to the fire.

There is an unspeakable delight in the cultivation of these dispositions, and equally so in their exercise when called into action; and such persons can easily understand with what genuine feelings of grateful joy the Apostle styled himself the *servant of Jesus Christ*. There is also a legitimate pleasure to be experienced from the privilege of being allied to such as have been, or are eminent in their profession of the faith: and we can therefore enter into the fraternal affection which burst from the heart of Jude, when he added to his higher title, "*Brother of James*." These are affections which the Lord approves. *Natural* affection he

has himself implanted in the creature. And when these ties are endeared, and sanctified by congeniality in spiritual desires and ways, there is an *unfeigned gratification which we do well to feel, and may lawfully express.* This is very different from that kind of pride in an eminent person as our relative, wherein there is nothing of an assimilating taste. Many may like to be allied even to christians, if they have been remarkable for talent, or influence, or integrity, without having any similarity, or any union of heart in the Lord. All such boasting is vain, and can reflect no real honour on the boaster.

In concluding our view of this character, let us be stirred up to seek a holy influence by which the Spirit may assimilate us with the saints, in such truth, as to bless us with a spiritual brotherhood that shall be acknowledged for ever. And O may he instruct us to estimate this bond beyond all the distinctions of this dying life, considering it better to be the servant of Jesus Christ, and the brother of the eminent in Christ, than to have crowns, kingdoms, and treasures in our possession or disposal.

PRAYER.

ETERNALLY blessed and gracious Lord, we pray Thee to reveal Thyself in us as Thou dost not unto the world, and to enter into our hearts with efficacious power. O manifest what Thou art as the Everlasting Saviour, God our keeper and life ; and build us up in our most holy faith, as temples wherein Thou wilt dwell. We desire to be separated from the world which lieth in wickedness, and to be associated with saints who are heirs of a better kingdom ; but we know that unless Thou impartest the precious revelation of Thyself to the

inner man, we are not in the privilege by which Thy children are distinguished. O stir us up to a more serious investigation of our state, than we have ever yet exercised; and let us not rest until we know with prevailing power how Thou dost manifest Thyself to Thy people. We trust that Thou wilt conduct us in these inquiries, and in pity to our necessities give us that blessed Spirit, who takes of the things that are Christ's, and reveals them to men. Make our hearts to receive these impartations teachably, lovingly, and abidingly; and may we be constrained by the knowledge of Thy dear name to follow Thee patiently, and count it our highest honour to be *servants of Jesus Christ*. In this service teach us to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; teach us to exercise the vigilant spirit of one who watches for the prosperity of Thy church; and, O blessed Lord, in mercy bless us in making us instrumental to turn sinners from the error of their ways, to pluck them from the fire, and to warn them of the miseries awaiting those who live unto the flesh. We would receive from Thee an anointing, filling us with tender sympathy, so that we may combine mercy with severity, and be able to make a difference, compassionating those who may be won by our labour of love. And never leave us to a spirit of resentment, or contention, or railing; but preserve us in the meek and gentle spirit, which is like unto the mind of our dear master; and which looks to the divine government for the regulation of the kingdom, and the rebuking of men. O Lord, we bless and praise Thee for putting before us the requirements of the gospel, and for shewing us Thy grace and sufficiency, not only in promises, but in examples, wherein we behold Thy willing power to save. Strengthen and help us, gracious Lord in following after Thee according to this

sacred rule, and bring us in victory to the glorious company of the saints above ; that we may for ever adore and celebrate Thy name. We supplicate for these mercies through the covenant of life in Christ. Amen.

SIMON ZELOTES.

Matt. x. 4.

THERE is no scriptural history of Simon Zelotes, distinct from what belongs to him, as one of the family of Disciples and Apostles chosen by our Lord. He was a man of Canaan; and his name imports that he was eminent for zeal; on which account it was most probably given him. There are many traditionary accounts of his labours and sufferings in the cause of Christ; but these are not sufficiently authenticated for our satisfaction. They may be true, but they may also be exaggerated; we do not therefore propose them as a suitable foundation on which to establish the developement of his character. It is enough that he stands upon record in the sacred page as a true believer and Apostle, to assure us of his acceptance amongst the number who are now in the region of blessedness; and that he has received that gracious rest in the invisible kingdom which his brother Apostles inherited. In him therefore we glorify the Lord, and give a tribute of renewed praise to Jesus who thus raised up a monument of his power, and of that all-sufficient grace which replenishes weak worms of the earth with a blessed ability to magnify and be spent for him.

JUDAS ISCARIOT.

Matt. x. 4.

WE here enter upon the examination of one of the most awful and frightful characters the earth ever bore, and are met by considerations the most affecting to us, both as they display the extent of depravity to which human nature can surrender itself, and as they lead back our thoughts to those scenes of sorrow wherein our dear Redeemer suffered unto death. Judas was one who professed discipleship to Christ, and was by the mysterious wisdom of the Lord numbered with the twelve, unto whom so many peculiar privileges were extended ; we therefore find him in the list of the Apostles. He is called Iscariot, but for what reason cannot be decidedly said. Some have thought it signified his service as the appointed purse-bearer ; but most probably it is from " Ish," a man, and " careth," " he that cuts off," signifying his character as a murderer. During the continuance of his Apostleship, he seems to have been unsuspected by his brethren, as having any disposition of falsehood ; he evidently exercised the same miraculous gifts as the rest, and maintained a creditable profession. He on one occasion betrayed the disposition which lurked in his breast ; but his companions were not aware of the motive by which he was actuated ; and being unsuspicious, it passed without observation. His prevailing passion being that of love of money, he could not endure the sight of that expression of respect paid by the disciple who anointed the head of Jesus with ointment : his covetous mind immediately calculated how much money might have been raised by the sale

of this ointment, and that it might have been deposited in the bag which he bore; and under the mask of seeming consideration for the poor, he openly objected to the act as *waste*, not (as the scripture says) that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag. Intimations were given by our Lord, that amongst those whom he had selected to fill the present offices belonging to the apostleship, there was one who remained destitute of the real principles of a believer, especially in John vi. 70; his mind apparently reflected upon the occurrence just recorded, wherein many followers had deserted his cause; and when Simon Peter, in the name of the rest of the twelve, had affirmed their purpose of adhering to him, this confidence Jesus openly checked, by immediately declaring one of those whom he had chosen, to be a *Devil*; to which is added, he spake of Judas Iscariot who should betray him. This design was, ere long, awfully accomplished; for when the hour was come wherein Jesus would yield himself to death, Satan put it into the heart of Judas to devise how he might dispose of his master to the highest advantage to himself; and after some deliberation, he presented himself before the rulers of the Jews, and proposed for a certain price to sell him into their hands. The agreement was made, and Judas was to receive thirty pieces of silver, (£3 : 15s. of our money, and the price paid for a slave,) on condition that he delivered up Jesus to their power. From this time he sought opportunity to betray him. Notwithstanding this diabolical purpose, Judas continued his association with the disciples. He was present with the rest, and heard what was said by our Lord, when he had washed the feet of the disciples, declaring that they were not *all clean*. John xiii. 10, 11. He also heard the Lord expound the prophetic testimony that had been spoken by

David, and told them, that one then present with him, would lift up his heel against him. John xiii. 18. He put the question with the others, "Lord, is it I?" Matt. xxvi. 25. And from these scenes, with the solemn warning sounding in his ears, he went forth from the company, fully given up to the possession of the Devil, and determined upon fulfilling his purpose, by conducting the murderers to the retirement whither Jesus was about to retreat. With this hallowed spot Judas was well acquainted, for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. John xviii. 2, 3, 5. The token by which the soldiers were to know their prey was agreed upon; Judas was to salute the person with a kiss, and urging them to be determined and to hold him fast, he sallied forth with the band of armed men. Leading them to the place where Jesus had been enduring his bloody conflict, he entered daringly into the Lord's presence and gave the diabolical token. Whither he retired after this is not recorded. But it was out of his power to retreat from *himself*. Intolerable pangs seized upon his soul; he was filled with horrors of the most terrific kind; the money for which he had betrayed his master was now a loathsome object; and, in the horror of an alarmed conscience, he returned to the rulers, took back the accursed mammon, threw it down in their presence, exclaiming, "I have betrayed the innocent blood," and departing from them, became the prey of utter despair; so that, unable to endure the wretchedness of his existence here, he advanced to the completion of his reprobate acts, and hanging himself, rushed into the burning abyss below, and left his body a miserable and awful spectacle to beholders, and a monument of his crime. Matt. xxvi. 48, 49: xxvii. 3, 5. Acts i. 16, 20. Thus fulfilling the prophetic witness of his wretched and condemned condition. Ps. xli. 9: lxix. 22—28: cix. 8.

Every particular of the character of Judas is full of tremendous crime; and we might perhaps be led to wonder, on what possible ground such a man could ever have been induced to enter into discipleship, professing to follow one in whom there appeared no promise of gratification to any of his domineering carnal desires. The secret purposes of God were concerned in this apparently inexplicable circumstance. But this is not enough to account for the act on the part of Judas, because Jehovah works upon and by us, as *rational* creatures; and when he uses the passions of the wicked, does so through the *voluntary* acts of such men. Judas therefore must have had some motive, inducing him to enter professedly into our Lord's service. As it is evident that his prevailing passion was love of money, it is most probable that he calculated upon finally advancing his worldly interests by this association. He knew so much of the expectation of a Hebrew, as to believe that the Messiah of the Jews was to be a universal king, and Lord of Glory. *Spiritual* dominion he of course neither considered nor understood. He would imagine that Jesus, by his miracles, &c. was paving the way for his acceptance in the nation, and would eventually rise to his throne, at which time no doubt he would remember his particular followers with suitable rewards. This expectation would afford to such a man as Judas, what he would deem a good speculation. Thus he might be induced to proffer himself as a disciple. In the mean time he had the opportunity for gratification. He had contrived to keep the management of the little fund, from which the family was supported, in his own hands, from which he was in the habit of pilfering, making for himself a private purse. And he obtained a sort of credit and glory, whilst he was enabled to work miracles, casting out devils, &c. From the beginning to the close of

his treacherous way, insincerity, selfishness, and hypocrisy were prevalent in his soul, advancing by rapid increase, into the completion of the most foul and diabolical life. With the most frightful excess of hardness remaining unaffected, and insensible to lessons, converse, terrors, tenderness ; and manifestly living in closest association with Christ externally, without one genuine internal emotion of regard, respect, or fear towards him, or of conviction, concern, or interest for his own soul. Every thing was absorbed in the one consideration of getting money ; and no principles of honour, feeling, or shame, deterred him from seeking this gratification.

One of the most awful features in the character of Judas is the *presumption* with which he conducted himself. It is possible that with his carnal mind, apprehensions of Christ's real glory were but feeble, if any ; yet he had beheld innumerable examples of his power to read the heart, and of his ability to detect secret deeds. In his own case, likewise, he had decided proofs that Jesus knew the characters around him, and understood the traitorous disposition lodged in his breast ; yet he hardened himself against all these evidences, dared to remain under the constant observation of Christ, ventured to the last supper, and with the most amazing effrontery put the question, " Is it I ? " seeking to cover his guilt from the brethren by an affected innocence, and, with desperate infatuation, venturing upon the forbearance of Christ, seeming to expect he would not further expose him ; or daringly resolved to brave the result of his question.

The same disposition is evinced in the whole of the transaction by which he betrayed the Lord. It was no rash or hasty deed, but *deliberate*, and the result of reflection, calculation, and a fixed intention to accomplish his object. Therefore it

is said he *sought* opportunity ; he was anxious for a favourable occasion, being greedy for the gain he anticipated ; and when that occasion arrived, manifesting an obduracy of heart, which, did we not know human nature, we should conceive impossible to exist in the breast of man. Every circumstance which had taken place, from the time that Jesus assembled his little band for the farewell interview, to the moment when Judas went out from the assembly, was of a description well suited to trouble the heart, and so to ransack the bosom, that if there had been one chord to touch, sympathy, tenderness, remorse, or some emotion of a softer kind, must have been discovered. But in Judas' bosom there lived not one emotion to be awakened by the appeal. The sight of his master engaged in his works of kindness,—the sound of his voice speaking in sublimest counsels,—the recollection of past scenes of professed intimacy, were all unavailing. Neither did the solemn midnight hour in Gethsemane's sacred haunts, kindle one spark of love or pity. A traitor, a devil, a wretch, under the power of hellish principle, he trampled on every thought of justice or truth ; and with unshaken insolence and treachery, could thrust himself forward in the deed, and salute the victim he had betrayed with "Hail, Master!" No words or imagination of ours can sufficiently pourtray the extent of this crime, the desperate hardness of this transgressor, the accumulated load of infamy and guilt thus voluntarily heaped upon his own wretched head ; making way for the proportion of equally inconceivably agony, which instantly rushed in upon his distracted mind and heart ; and which meeting no barrier or obstacle, carried its desolating fury through the whole man, and made him a hell to himself. This anguish, however, was not repentance, such as the heart truly broken for sin expe-

riences. It is said "he repented *himself*." He was filled with remorse under the sense of what he had done, but not with genuine grief for having sinned *against God*. It was not *repentance towards God*, not to be repented of; and it had not faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. He acknowledged that he had betrayed the innocent blood, but he had no thought of the application of that blood to his own wretched case. Selfishness, despair, and a tumult of diabolical passions took him captive; and without either dread of the eternity awaiting him, or one cry to God, he madly plunged into his burning bed; entering it by a final act of rebellion and crime, and presumptuously disposing of that life which was now a curse. Thus his miserable career closed by his entering, as the Scripture expresses it, "*his own place*," that is, his proper home, the region of hell.

Our Lord determines the character of this man, by declaring him to be a *devil*. He had the spirit of darkness, was the child of Satan, a murderer, a deceiver, a traitor, an enemy to the Christ of God. Yet it is said, the devil put it into his heart to betray Christ, and after the sop, the devil entered into him. These expressions shew us his gradual advance in diabolical infatuation. He was in his own nature devilish; Satan's suggestions found an instant and entire agreement in this nature, and when delivered up in consequence of his own sin to the full dominion of his crime, it was to the full subjection of the devil, as his chosen ruler, and now about to use him as his vassal, and to torture him as his prey.

This subject is one of solemn import; and it affords lessons to us; for although the *circumstances* of Judas were peculiar, his *nature* was not different from our own. And even in the midst of the professing church, there are those who retain this

nature, so that Jesus looking upon the body of professors may still say, "ye are not *all clean*." We most probably shrink from the idea of having our state compared with that of Judas, or of devils; yet the word of God presents the awful fact, that we are all properly to be considered children of Satan, because we evince from our very birth the dispositions of this fallen spirit, and are manifestly aliens from God. Or if brought into a profession of Christianity, we still betray that the external privilege is in too many instances all that is possessed. We cannot form our judgment by the mere exterior. Who was there that thought Judas to be a devil? probably not even himself; for sin has a thousand plausible arguments, by which to reconcile the sinner to its dominion, and as many masks whereby to conceal its really hideous character. It is temptation and opportunity which develop the horrible dispositions lurking in the breast; and more or less we may be assured, that we shall on such occasions be found exhibiting a heart that is in friendship with the evil one, and far from God.

There is nothing more to be dreaded in a Christian profession than insincerity; if allowed, it always leads into settled hypocrisy; and any indulged domineering lust, that hides itself under such a mask, will soon become our master, and conduct us into any crime, however monstrous, for its gratification. When once involved in an unsound profession of the Christian faith, we are standing on the edge of a frightful precipice; and what *began* by an indulgence of sin, excused and palliated by false reasonings, will *end* in a deliberate resolve to retain *profession and sin*. Thus the soul grows increasingly presumptuous, and is as capable as Judas was, of sitting under the gospel, attending sacraments, uniting in prayer, and even of wearing the semblance of self-investigating appeals to

Christ, whilst the heart is bent upon its covetousness, and the omniscient presence of the Lord is defied. The love of this world, and covetousness, do not appear to men so scandalous and dangerous as some other sins. Yet in these, how often is a Judas' spirit concealed. How many professors there are who grudge the expenses incurred in the promotion of Christ's name, honour, or work, if it affects their *own purse*, pretending to consider them *waste*, and seeking to shelter themselves under a lying pretence that they care for the poor, and can dispose of their possessions more satisfactorily. How many are defective in those religious trusts in which they are employed, not rendering a just return of what they received, but using or occupying it to their own advantage! How many rob the Lord of tributes of honour and glory, not giving to him the just acknowledgment of his name and grace! How many sell him into the enemies' hands for some paltry despicable consideration of worldly gain or profit! How many give him the traitor's kiss, with "hail, Master," whilst they are secretly confederates with the world and his avowed enemies! These evils certainly exist amongst professors; and they all arise out of a spirit like that of Judas. We therefore should humbly investigate ourselves, and be very fearful of all covetous desires, lest we be dragged by the chains of our lust into the deeps of misery and hell.

Let us also be very careful to ascertain the nature of our repentance of sin. We have many instances of *remorse* for sin, when there is no true contrition. A sorrow that is confined to some *one* deed, or that turns upon the consideration of *personal* ruin induced by the offence, without entering into the nature of him whom we have offended, or the nature of our heart from whence the offence proceeded, is partial and selfish. True repentance is *comprehensive*, embracing the infinite One whose

name and laws we have dishonoured, and the abomination of the sink of all evil that is in us ; which is *now* looked upon with dread and abhorrence. There is also *this* peculiarity in true contrition : it has *hope*. Despair belongs not to the Spirit's work ; and however desperately conflicting the state of the penitent may be, there is still a *look to Jesus*. It is not the *greatness of the crime* that excludes any soul from pardon ; but the want of true faith in the propitiation. Despair and selfishness shut the remedy out, and this is done when remorse is only from corrupt feelings ; but when it springs from the operation of the Holy Ghost, it opens for the healing balm, and takes the blood of Jesus to a bleeding heart. O let us then come to the Lord uprightly—confess comprehensively—kiss him in sincerity—dread the doom of a traitor and hypocrite—and cleave to him with full purpose of heart.

PRAYER.

ETERNALLY gracious and merciful God, behold us, who now enter Thy presence, with the mercy which flows to sinners through a crucified Redeemer, and graciously accept the offering which we lay at Thy feet. We open our whole heart to Thee, that the misery lodged there may be explored, and the remedy provided in Christ be applied. O look upon the sore diseases, and the deep corruption belonging to us as sinners, with a purpose to rescue us from the effects of our ruin ; and bring us, we pray Thee, O God, to the experience of Thy great salvation. Root out of our hearts all covetous desires,—all love of this evil world—all corrupt motives in making our profession of Thy name ; and impart to each of us a spirit of sincerity, that we may follow Thee in

simplicity and truth. We beseech Thee, O Lord, to sanctify to us every example recorded in Thy word of the state of sinners, and of their awful end; turn our reflections into the solemn train which ought to be consequent upon such views of human depravity; and may we thus obtain a greater degree of vigilance in keeping our own hearts, and a greater sense of the unspeakable privilege of having an interest in Thy redemption. Blessed be Thy name for the marvellous provision of pardon, life, and peace, in the sacrifice of our dear Lord, and that we who have sinned, who have in too many instances betrayed Thee, and have evinced a hard, unfeeling, remorseless heart, are still within the reach of the subduing power of the cross; and, some of us at least, been made partakers of its efficacious grace. With unfeigned gratitude we praise and bless Thee; with heartfelt penitence we lament that we have transgressed against Thee; O blessed Lord, receive us to Thy faithful tender mercy, so as to heal all the breaches occasioned by sin between Thee and us, and to invest us with the full possession of Thy manifested peace. Thus may we give Thee the salutation of unfeigned and devoted hearts, and cleave to Thee in humility and faith, unto the end of our pilgrimage here; then, Lord, receive us to glory, and bid us enter into rest, through the blood of the eternal covenant. Amen.

HEROD ANTIPAS, TETRARCH OF GALILEE.

Matt. xiv. 1.

HEROD ANTIPAS was son to Herod the Great, whose character we considered on a former occasion. His mother was a Hebrewess, and his father was a proselyted Idumean, so that by religious profession he was educated as a Jew. When Herod his father died, his dominions were divided amongst his four sons, and continued for a short time under these separate governments; and the region of Galilee fell to the lot of Herod Antipas. He is called *Tetrarch*, which signifies "Ruler of the fourth part;" but he was also *King* of the smaller region thus possessed. See Luke iii. 1. xxiii. 7, 8. Mark vi. 14. He married a daughter of Aretas King of Arabia; but soon afterwards divorced her, that he might marry Herodias, who was his sister in law, and whose husband Philip was still living; inducing her along with her daughter Salome to leave Philip, and unite herself to him. This Herodias was grand-daughter to Herod the Great, and in consequence *neice* also, both to Herod Antipas and Philip. It was for this incestuous connection that John Baptist so faithfully reprov'd Herod. An act of integrity which brought upon him the hatred of the whole party, and lodged a deep-seated malignity towards him in the breast of Herodias, which finally vented itself in his murder. Fear of the people, who all held John as a prophet, restrained the expression of this resentment, excepting by imprisonment. They durst not proceed to extremity against him, but placed him under confinement, where he is said to have remained one year. The occasion of Herod's birthday, however,

afforded the opportunity for which Herodias thirsted. Herod, under the excitement of passionate admiration of Salome, rashly pledged himself by an oath, to give her whatsoever she should ask; and, by the direction of her mother, she immediately presented her request for the head of John Baptist, with which, under an appearance of some reluctance, Herod complied.

Some time after the murder of John, Herod heard of the fame of Jesus, and was perplexed and alarmed; and he began to fear that this was John returned to the earth; and his mind was occasionally a prey to anxiety. For the satisfaction of his thoughts, and from a mixture of curiosity, he longed for an opportunity to see and converse with Christ. But he seems to have made no concealment of his intention, if a favourable occasion should offer, of putting Jesus also to death. Luke xiii. 31. He appears to have maintained some profession of religion, he observed the Jewish feasts, and was at Jerusalem when the passover was preparing. It was on this occasion that he had the opportunity of seeing and conversing with our Lord, and that he hoped to have seen some miracle performed by him. For this end he questioned him much, and seems to have expected, that by these means he should provoke the Lord to display his power. When disappointed in this expectation, he insolently mocked and derided him; and in an agreement of spirit with the malignant Jews, committed or allowed every indignity to be expressed against the sacred person of Messiah. By this congeniality of spirit in what is evil and at enmity with holiness, Herod was made friends with Pontius Pilate, for before this they were at variance with each other. Luke xxiii. 7—10. Acts iv. 27.

This wretched slave to iniquity was not suffered to remain long without an expression of divine retribution upon him. Soon after the death of our

Lord, Arctas declared war against Herod, on account of his conduct to his daughter, and his marriage with Herodias. This contest ended disastrously to Herod, and he was soon afterwards brought into suspicion and disgrace with the Roman power, and banished from his territories. He died in exile in a distant land. Josephus says, in Spain. Herodias was involved in the same disgrace, and died in banishment. It is said that Salome was visited by an awful judgment for her crime; for that falling through some ice into a river which she was adventuring to pass over, she was caught in her fall by the closing sheets of the broken ice, and that by the blow her head was violently severed from her body.

The whole of those scenes, which are presented us in this history, afford opportunity for the evidence of human depravity; yet there are some parts of Herod's life and disposition which, if considered independently of their motives and accompaniments, might have *seemed* to demand a measure of respect. It is evident that as to his judgment he was convinced of the existence of the one true God; he saw and abstained from the sin and folly of the heathens, and embraced the worship of Israel; *professing* an attention to those institutions which the true faith enjoined upon the servants of Jehovah to observe, and travelling to Jerusalem in obedience to these laws, that he might keep the feast of the passover. It is also evident that he believed in the wonderful revelation respecting the resurrection of the dead; for without hesitation he expressed his faith in this respect, when he feared the re-appearance of John Baptist. He had some fears of eternity, which shewed that his faith was not wholly without practical influence, he dreaded the guilt he might contract by the breach of an oath; he had his conscience and affections moved

by the testimony of John, for he heard him *gladly*, and did *many things* which John prescribed, manifestly revering the course of that holy man, accepting his counsels as of sacred authority, and admitting the conviction of his mind in regulating some parts of his conduct. All this wears the appearance of good, and certainly demonstrates, that Herod was far from being an *insensible* sinner.

When turning to the other parts of this character, we immediately pronounce that this very circumstance, of having a conscience in some degree touched by the word, so far from exculpating, criminated him the more. He was a slave to every vicious passion, notwithstanding these partial acts of compliance with God's will, and with daring effrontery violated every just and righteous obligation. By the impulse of these domineering passions he lived in incest of the foulest kind, dishonoured his own character, and that of all allied to him, and gave the rein to his pleasures, in mad and intoxicating devotion to whatever could contribute to his unhallowed gratification. He was enslaved to the power of an abandoned woman, and to her was ready to sacrifice every better feeling. In this foul subjection to sin, he committed other crimes of a fearful extent, doing violence to his conscience, and, notwithstanding misgivings of mind and heart, taking shelter in the false refuge of an insincere argument, and consenting to the murder of him whom he believed to be a good man. But he had accustomed his conscience to be obedient to his lusts, otherwise he could not have resisted the manifest justice of John's rebuke, or have allowed that righteous man to linger out twelve months in prison, only because he had discharged a positive and evident duty. By contemplating the progress of this man, we seem to find him advancing in a state of insolent independence of law, and of in-

creased indifference to the checks he had formerly received in his sins. That he was secretly alarmed by the report of our Lord's wonderful ministry and works is declared; yet his terrors were subject to stronger passions; and if he really designed the murder of Christ, he demonstrated that the internal apprehension he suffered from fear of future punishment was not so great as his aversion to present reproof. But as Jesus styles Herod a *fox*, *cunning* and *designing*, as well as mischievous, possibly his threat against the Lord might be intended to deter him from his public ministry, hoping to intimidate him by dread of his power. His whole conduct respecting our Lord was the exhibition of ripened iniquity. Had he possessed any genuine desire to see and hear Jesus, opportunities were abundant; but his was only the excitement of curiosity and selfishness; he would have been relieved of a certain uneasiness, when he had found that John was not now about to trouble him again, and he would have been glad to see those wonders which it was reported Jesus wrought. His contempt and derision of the Lord was a crowning act of reprobacy, and preceded his own sentence as given up by God to destruction, here and for ever. That this sin was of a determined and deliberate malignity, arising out of a heart where real enmity to God prevailed, is very evident from the whole of his proceedings, more especially from the circumstance of his receiving Pontius Pilate, his own avowed enemy, into friendship, on no other ground but that they united in hating, opposing, and murdering Jesus Christ. These are traits of a frightful character. The judgments of the Almighty against him are justified; his own iniquities laid hold upon him, and executed the vengeance of the Lord; and he died a miserable monument of the avenging justice of him against whom he had sinned with a high hand;

living however to see his wretched partners in crime his companions in punishment.

These examples are full of the most instructive lessons to men in all ages, and under all circumstances, but especially to those who have religious advantage, or profess to admit the divine law. *We* are amongst those who by birth and education possess these distinctions ; and, equally with Herod, we probably see the folly of the heathen superstition, and embrace a religion which we consider more pure, and the only divine revelation. Perhaps also like him we have an exterior, a form, a partial degree of obedience, with which we please others and ourselves. It is by no means an uncommon occurrence for persons to manifest a zeal for the forms of religion, without any of its power ; and for the words of some favourite instructor, or the course of some holy man to attract admiration and force conviction, so as to constrain us to *do many things* in consequence, which we consider would please our teacher, or which we allow to be incumbent before God. It is also no unusual thing for persons to have some curiosity respecting characters or proceedings in the church, which have attracted the attention of other men ; and passing wishes, or purposes, if a favourable opportunity presents itself, of seeking to have an interview, or to see what is reported with their own eyes, will occupy the thought or tongue ; and all this with no other design but to be satisfied whether the report be true or not, or to have some personal gratification as from a passing wonder. We may discover these dispositions in innumerable instances, possibly in ourselves ; and if we do, should *remember Herod*, and not be at rest whilst thus evidently comparable to such a reprobate from God.

Revelation speaks but one harmonious testimony respecting man : and if we attend to its witness,

we are in possession of what the Lord will judge of human character and proceedings. No scanty compliance with the requirements which cost us nothing, will reconcile the Lord to our scandalous breaches of the positive command. He dealeth not with this bribery; and unless we have an energetic desire to the universal standard exhibited through the divine messages, our professed obedience is abhorred and rejected. It is hypocritical, insincere, insolent, and demonstrates that the heart is as much wedded to its lusts as if it had no measure of conviction, and no sense of eternity. Usually men of this description give open evidence of their want of integrity; for when the word touches them upon any favourite lust, they are offended, and not only refuse obedience, but hate the instrument that has troubled their carnal repose. "It is not lawful for thee," is a sentence from which a sinner starts with indignation, if it be directed against his idol; and in innumerable forms he feels and will express his rage and desperation. It is thus that transgressors daily take up arms against the Almighty himself; and for the same reason that the meek but faithful remonstrances of the saints are returned by persecution, imprisonments, and death. We are not to conclude that we are incapable of such madness; rather let us ask how it is we feel when the *personal* rebuke is given, or when the resignation of a darling passion is required. Have we no movements of displeasure? no excitements to resentment? no obstinacy in vindicating and maintaining our own will? no wish to get rid of the troublesome adviser? If not, it is by grace which has truly sanctified the will; for in nature we are all like Herod, and, according to our power or station, equally ready to express the disposition he evinced. These dispositions are greatly confirmed by the corrupt associations we have formed. Sinners will

always have those around them, whose business and interest it seems lies in the way of ministering to the lusts of their companions, and who help to irritate and inflame the passions by their remarks upon the subject of dispute ; more especially from those who are involved in the same rebuke or condemnation, who, like Herodias, consider themselves insulted, injured, and justified in the indulgence of the most violent and furious indignation. Can we be surprised, if under the power of such inward and outward counsellors, that we proceed to the perpetration of scandalous or of murderous deeds ? Do we not know that sin is progressive in its nature, advancing step after step to more frightful habits and confirmed depravity ? Are we not aware that in moments of this description, we are ready for Satan to act upon ; and for the deliberate or rash expression of our iniquity, just as may best answer his purpose, or ensure our downfall ? Surely example should persuade us of the liability of a sinful heart to all these strong delusions ; and we should improve what we so awfully contemplate in others, to the furtherance of our own self-distrust and humility. Even a professor of religion may degenerate into the conduct of a persecutor. He who has done many things, may perish for retaining one sin. The man who has imagined himself moved to honour the minister and saint, may speedily put forth his decree to the murder of the man he esteemed. So obstinate, so loud, is the cry of lust in the heart, that it drowns the remonstrances of conscience, and triumphs in the captivity of the soul. O let us dread the evils of our heart ; let us fear a connivance with any bosom sin ; let us be afraid of the influence of sinful associates, and walk before God in holy awe.

It is at all times necessary for us to exercise this godly jealousy : but there are particular seasons of danger, wherein we are called upon to put forth

a more than usual circumspection. A time of rejoicing, on any public or domestic occasion, is attended with a corresponding excitement of the natural spirits, which, without care, will lead into temptation. We are disposed to be off our guard, to fall in with the general spirit around us, and sometimes into levity; by which we provoke an assault from the enemy. It is very customary, in families, to have certain days of festivity, especially a *birth day*, on which it is agreed there shall be a suspension of usual studies, occupation, and labour, that every branch of the household may have some participation in what is deemed pleasure. There is no harm or sin in the custom itself, if it be observed in a *Christian* spirit. Indeed occasions for thanksgiving and praise should be marked by us with some expression of suitable feeling. But let us ask, if a conformity, in these seasons, to the conduct of Herod, or Herodias, or Salome, be such as should satisfy a believer? Revelry, dancing, and excesses of this description, are offensive to the Lord, and no proper expression of the gratitude of a *Christian's* heart; and when observed, usually introduce much further offence, by the passions, or imprudence, or vanity excited in those who are partakers in the scene. Days of this description should be begun in prayer, passed in regulated cheerfulness, and ended in such a way as to afford a retrospect when we retire to rest, ministering fresh food to praise, and new motives to the love of our Lord. Let us strive to possess and to diffuse to others, especially to young people, these precious influences, that all our enjoyments may be embued with the habit and affections of those who derive their dearest happiness from the bosom of the Lord. The pursuits of the licentious, and the pleasures of dissipation, end in ruin, shame, and final woe. Those of the believer are rich in present peace, and conduct to advancing fellowship

and meetness of spirit for the exalting joys that are above.

PRAYER.

BLESSED and everlasting God, our Saviour, O in much mercy receive our tribute, hear our appeal, and answer our desires, that we may not depart from Thy presence at this time without receiving some tokens of thy matchless grace. Look upon us in pity, for we have need of all that Thy compassion can extend to our souls. We are poor, we are guilty, and we are exposed from day to day to increase and accumulate our load of misery. To whom shall we turn, O Lord, for relief and consolation, if not to Thee? Vain are all earthly hopes, and insufficient all human aid; but Thou art the Lord God Almighty, having plenteous redemption and abundance of grace. Extend to us, we beseech Thee, a portion of Thy eternal love; and amongst the favoured children who receive a Father's blessing, O number us who now kneel before Thee. Most blessed Jehovah, we ask no other peace, for in Thine we have all that the soul can need. O be our everlasting inheritance, and make us Thy portion through the eternal world. We are filled with an awful sense of the depravity of a sinful nature, when we read or hear these records of the crimes of men. Our minds are impressed with a sense of Thy justice in condemning rebellious man, and our hearts are deeply affected by the demonstration that is so perpetually given of the sinner's presumptuous resistance of Thy word and law. In mercy render these impressions abiding and practical; granting that we may humble ourselves, for we are partakers in the same nature, and are equally vile in our original state. Be pleased to awaken us to the sense of that

amazing grace which has taught us to fear Thy judgments, and to desire Thy love. May the persuasion of Thy love to us, in this work of power, constrain us to the most entire devotion to Thy service. O may we never lose for a moment the recollection of Thy matchless condescension—of Thy sovereign love: but may we, O God, give glory to Thee for the change wrought in our hearts, and manifest Thy honour in the consistency of loving adherence. Most gracious God, give these Thy free mercies to us, raise us as monuments of Thy glory, and fill us with Thy peace in Jesus our Lord. Amen.

CAIAPHAS.

Matt. xxvi. 3.

It is proper, in entering upon our view of the character of Caiaphas, to explain, in the first place, an apparent confusion in the history, which gives the title of High Priest both to Caiaphas and Annas. It was contrary to the whole of the divine appointment that there should be more than one person at a time officiating in this office ; but the nation of Israel was at this time no longer in possession of an independent power to regulate their own affairs ; and all their ecclesiastical concerns partook of the disorders which had disgraced their degraded kingdom. The Roman power interfered whenever it saw good, both in matters civil and religious ; hence the office of High Priest was disposed of by the secular power, from the various motives actuating the seat of government at the time. In this interference, no regard was paid to regular succession, or to the divine ordinance. Frequently the High Priest was deposed, and another installed in the office, according to the caprice of the Romans. Ever since the time of the Maccabees a kind of regal authority was vested in this office ; and when the Jews came under the Roman power, the High Priest was both ruler of the people, and president of the Sanhedrim. This office had been filled by Annas, who was deposed from the priesthood, Pontius Pilate putting Caiaphas in his place ; but he retained his dignities as ruler and president. Thus Annas and Caiaphas are *both* called High Priests ; see Luke iii. 2.

The character of Caiaphas is presented as amongst the most heinous transgressors. It was in his

palace that the priests &c. assembled to consult for the destruction of Christ ; when, as we have seen in our Lord's history, some dispute arose as to the method of proceeding against him—or whether it were proper to proceed to desperate extremities. When Caiaphas, taking into consideration the peril he pretended the nation to be in on account of Jesus' course, gave it as his opinion, that he should instantly be apprehended, and executed as a sacrifice for the safety of the people. This opinion decided the assembly, and they took measures accordingly, Matt. xxvi. 3 ; John xi. 47—53. When our Lord was apprehended, we read that the soldiers led him first to Annas, who sent him bound to Caiaphas, John xviii. 13, 14. 24 ; before whose tribunal our Lord stood, being examined respecting his doctrines and his disciples, and adjured to answer if he were the Son of God ; being also violently accused by false witnesses suborned for this purpose, Matt. xxvi. 57—63 ; Caiaphas, at length, with an affected vehemence for the glory of God, appealing to the assembly, if he were not evidently guilty, and proceeding to pass the sentence of condemnation, 64—68. It was not however in the power of the Jews to *execute* a sentence of death, nor legally to *pass* one ; and Jesus was sent to the Roman governor, Matt. xxvii. 2.

We read again of Caiaphas, after the ascension of our Lord, retaining the same hatred and persecuting spirit against the disciples, as he had shown to Jesus. He assembled with others against Peter and John ; and, as we considered in the history of those apostles, expressed the desperate purpose of his soul, if it were possible, to extirpate christianity from the earth, Acts iv. 6. 15—18. He also sat in judgment against Stephen, Acts vii. 1. And he authorized Saul of Tarsus to prosecute his bloody designs against all who called upon the name of Jesus, Acts ix. 1, 2. We have no infor-

mation of his death ; he is merely introduced to us in scripture as one of the diabolical instruments of murder, engaged in the sacrifice of Christ, and in the persecution of his people ; and having done his dark work, he is left by the sacred historians without further notice.

The character and principles of Caiaphas were a combination of ignorance, wickedness, and infidelity, under the mask of religion. He was a pretended friend and advocate of religion, and from his office familiar with holy things, and a stated instructor of the people, who heard the law from his mouth, and to whom were committed the keeping of all those typical services by which the Jewish people were distinguished. Yet it is evident that his own mind was entirely ignorant and unaffected by the truths which he was the instrument of proclaiming to others. His opportunity for knowing the divine revelation respecting Messiah was most advantageous, for he possessed the scriptures, he contemplated and officiated in typical ordinances, and was bound to give them more than a superficial notice ; because, as a teacher of others, it was requisite to be more minutely acquainted with the law. Yet under all these helps, he was totally destitute of spiritual discernment ; he had no perception into the nature of the law, or the need of sacrifice ; and from some parts of the record we are led to surmise, that he was in fact very infidel in his views, and if not professedly a Sadducee, yet abetting their false and infidel opinions. It seems that with this sect he assembled to bring a charge against the apostles respecting the resurrection, Acts iv. 1, 2. 6. In addition to the possession of the scriptures, and the shadows exhibited in the ceremonial law, he had the privilege of living in a period when he might have compared the life, the miracles, and doctrines

of Jesus, with the divine records ; and had he been possessed of candour and integrity he would have done this. But his *affections* were carnal ; he desired not such a Christ, such a fulfilment of promise, and therefore closed his eyes to the light. The same principles prevailed throughout the whole of his proceedings. The evidences which justified our Lord, in judgment, in death, in the grave, in the descent of the Holy Ghost, and in the power attendant upon the gospel after his ascension, were all resisted and blasphemed ; and if we rest with attention upon the several traits visible in his history, we shall be persuaded, that in this and in the whole of his spirit there was a deliberate resolve upon the evil, and a voluntary resistance of the Spirit. The *root* of his abominations may be found in the enmity of his heart to spiritual religion ; and the motives and reasonings, by which he was governed, may be resolved into carnal and worldly policy. Under these influences he entered into the lists as an antagonist against the Lord Jehovah, fighting under Satan's banner, and daringly rushing upon perdition. He scrupled not to bribe men to perjury ; he had no hesitation in calumniating known innocence ; he presumptuously uttered his contempt of him of whose justice and truth he was convinced : he dared to deliver him up into the hands of the vilest mob and rudest multitude ; he cunningly pretended an appeal to heaven, a zeal for God, a horror of blasphemy, an ignorance of the tenets taught by Jesus, a purpose to make just investigation ;—all with the intention of working upon the passions of the hearers, so as to darken counsel, and prejudice judgment, and as a cover to predetermined machination, and murderous purposes, which were fixed and immovably established in his heart. And having thus entered the dreadful contest and as it were clasped hands with the devil in firmest

confederacy, he continued to pour forth his own bloody devices against the flock, and to authorise blood, and murder, and torture, so far as his influence could extend. Thus we behold in Caiaphas the dreadful combination of injustice, pride, infatuation, impenitence, and desperate infidel resistance of the Almighty, along with plausible pretensions of justice, candour, knowledge, and zeal;—a hypocrite before God and man, and a desperate transgressor perishing in the midst of light!

It is affecting to behold so many examples of the inadequacy of all human restraint, or opportunities, to the destruction of native enmity against God. Advantages should be sought and valued; but alas! how many have them to their own destruction, rather than to any saving effects! Usually we look more at the external means than to the internal power, in those ordinances and privileges which we possess; and if we do this, it follows, that we content ourselves with *reading* the word, or with attending the sacraments, unmindful of the necessity of having enmity removed from the heart, blindness from the eye, and ignorance from the mind. This none can do but the omnipotent Holy Ghost; and to him we ought to raise our intense application, looking to him, watching his operations, waiting for his grace, and asking him to reveal hidden mysteries, shewing us the Christ of God. Blessed and effectual are these teachings! By them we are enabled to behold, in the prophecy, the promise, or the type, as in a glass, the beautiful form of him who is despised and rejected by the natural mind; and thus we are gradually conducted to enlarged views of the substance of all divine engagements in Jesus of Nazareth. If this is not our possession, we shall be like Caiaphas in respect of the written word, or the *scripture* Messiah; not

perceiving the end of the divine appointment in a lowly king ; or seeing it, and rising in native enmity against a revelation that militates against *our* fancied joys.

We should not read these scripture statements of the workings of carnal policy, without great and serious attention. They are not designed merely to present before us some character, living in distant periods of the world, but to point out the necessity of personal vigilance. We learn by such records to dread the effect of reigning considerations for worldly good. If we are in bondage to this corruption, we are exposed to the temptations which are inseparable from it : and slaves such as these will be capable of perverting judgment, by winking at the falsehood of unprincipled men, provided they contribute to their plans and interests : or of using corrupt influences towards others, and so perverting their own way ; they will ridicule the more scrupulous, and they will even condemn the restraints suggested by conscience. We have examples of this in too many who occupy stations of importance, and whose office should be held sacred to the claims of justice and truth. And what renders this condition the more terrible is, that self-complacency, and determination in the pursuit of personal advantages, tends to harden the heart, and confirm the habit of self-imposition and hypocrisy. It is not the most tremendous, or the most alluring demonstrations of the divine glory, that in such cases will reduce the proud spirit of the sinner. And when a breach of the law of integrity is upon the subject of any *religious* question, the infatuation and resolve of the soul is yet more determined. No clearest evidence from scripture, no manifestations of the power and majesty of Jehovah, no example of Christian truth and simplicity, no angel face of the martyr, the sufferer, the saint, have any power over the seered

conscience and insensible heart ; but, with the mind and spirit of Caiaphas, the gospel is resisted, Jesus denied, and his servants made the subjects of oppression and scorn. We have seen this in full exhibition through the history of the church of Christ, and we still look upon the same dispositions operating, and disclosing themselves, from time to time, in the world, and even in those who professedly, by office, and by word, and by pretensions, are pledged to maintain *the truth*.

Whilst we lament the existence of these evils, in stations, or in the sacred ministry especially, where we might reasonably hope to experience and witness the life of faith and the practice of justice, we must not undervalue the office itself. Our blessed Lord taught his hearers to exercise a holy discrimination between the sins of the individuals who administered to them, and the divine institution or ordinance. What he taught is presented practically before us in the case of Caiaphas, who, notwithstanding his abominable personal guilt, was the unconscious instrument of speaking prophetically upon the subject most sublime, and most interesting to the souls of men. It was his design to utter only the purpose of his murderous passion ; but in so doing, the Holy Ghost made use of his organs of speech, to proclaim the great doctrine of salvation by the sacrifice of Jesus. A salvation which the evangelist joyfully testified, would stretch its glorious and recovering grace beyond the bounds of Israel, and embrace within its merciful purpose sinners of every clime. Thus we perceive that the Holy Spirit will frequently put honour upon the divine institutions, even when the office has been awfully abused, not rendering the souls of the redeemed, or the efficacy of ordinances, dependant upon the character of the officiating priest, but demonstrating that the excellency of the power is of God, who will

work by his own means victoriously and with sovereignty. This is very instructive to us. It teaches us not to confide in the minister with idolatrous estimation, as if the blessing to our souls proceeded from *him*, and not to despond under a ministry that is disgraced by the officiating person. Our eyes are to be elevated above instruments and mediums, looking through all that interposes between us and the immediate source of our hopes and joys, and believing that this divine Saviour will still acknowledge us in all his own appointments, and is alone the author of all our saving discoveries. Were we more simple in our dependance, we should experience more equality of peace and hope: nor would it disquiet us, as frequently is the case, should we, in God's providence, live under the ministration of men like Caiaphas. Jesus is still the great Shepherd, the Holy Ghost still acts in his blessed offices, as witness, comforter, and guide; and he will speak to the lowly heart, and impart his consolation to the recumbent soul; well pleased to own this childlike satisfaction with the ways of God, and this loving confidence in the promise of the covenant. The closer we are driven, or drawn, to the bosom of our faithful Lord, the happier for us, the purer our joys. Let us then learn to esteem even such grievous circumstances as those now represented as amongst blessings in disguise, if they are instrumental to make us look with a more single eye to our living head, the Lord Jesus Christ. In a little while all the sufferings, or apparent privations, under which we now are disposed to groan, will have passed away. It will then visibly appear to have been our privilege, rather to have endured wrongfully, partaking of the baptism of our beloved Lord, than to have been *let alone* to follow the leadings or impulse of our own depraved nature. And while we at

this moment contemplate the difference between the wretched Caiaphas and the Blessed One who stood condemned at his bār ; let us, with grateful tributes to our Lord, bless him for putting us in spirit, or in lot, with the persecuted rather than with persecutors. By these reflections and internal appeals to our God, we may receive the advantage which records like these are designed to secure ; on one hand guarding against, and seeking to mortify all the evil in us, that conforms our character to the sinner we behold, and on the other, pressing towards, and appreciating those spiritual distinctions, which properly belong to the oppressed for Christ's sake.—In patience, possessing our souls.

P R A Y E R.

Most blessed and eternal Lord, we earnestly solicit the manifestations of favour which Thou givest to such as wait at Thy mercy-seat. And we now present ourselves before that precious blood-sprinkled Throne, pleading the atonement, and waiting for the blessings which fall upon sinners through the covenant of Thy love. We are assured that, in Jesus crucified, Thou didst behold an atoning sacrifice ; and we know that his death can never lose its virtue, or cease to plead effectually for redeemed souls. O then give us boldness in our supplications when thus offered, that we may believe Thou wilt hear and answer. The innumerable necessities which belong to us sinners, the many which press upon us as saints, the varied tribulations and wants which come upon us from the world, are so many subjects of interest that we would spread before Thee. But, O Lord, we know not where to begin, or how to end, in a history so full and so important. Read it all

therefore, Thou blessed God, with Thy heart-searching power, and look into the deep recesses of our breast, and relieve, and bless, and deliver us, according to Thy own love and grace. Above all things, we pray for deliverance from those bosom sins which are discoverable by Thee, and which lead to the condition of banishment from Thee. We would be relieved from the fetter of our old nature, and brought into the liberty of the gospel of peace. O mercifully extend this Thy purpose to us, and be our redemption, and give us life. Preserve us from those awful crimes which have disgraced the wretched slaves to Satan and sin ; keep us from those workings of a depraved nature which lead to hypocrisy ; and let us not be so wretchedly the bond-servants of hell, as to harden ourselves in fighting against Thee. Grant, O Lord, that what we read of the course of such transgressors, may be sanctified to us, awakening a heartfelt abhorrence of all iniquity, and a resolute determination to war against it in every form whereby it might betray or destroy us. And may we obtain advancing views of the necessity of receiving the Holy Ghost, by whom to be raised from this death in trespasses and sins, and in whom to have victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Blessed be Thy name that hope lives in our breast, and, that resting upon Thy promises in the blood of the covenant, we trust to be more than conquerors, and to praise Thee for evermore. To the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, our one eternal God, be honour, love, and praise. Amen.

MARY, MARTHA, AND LAZARUS.

Matt. xxvi. 6. Luke x. 38. John xi ; xii. 1—7.

IN this portion we may embrace the three persons comprising that holy family in Bethany, with whom Jesus oftentimes held communion, and who were eminently dear and devoted to him. The brother and two sisters had but one heart towards our blessed Lord, and in that heart but one moving spring of action—*love* to their Master. Yet their devotion was differently expressed, according to the variety existing in their natural dispositions or circumstances. We are first introduced to these disciples in Luke x. 38 ; and from the manner in which the circumstances of the family are described, we may conclude that Martha was the elder, and that Mary and Lazarus were younger. Thus she is spoken of as occupying the house, into which *she* invited, and where *she* made the preparations for Jesus. In the after record also, which respects this family, the same apparent authority and responsibility seem vested in Martha ; Mary and Lazarus appearing to be under a kind of maternal direction and care, which she affectionately, but with some natural anxiety, continued to discharge. On the occasion when Jesus entered this abode, as Luke x. Mary was filled with a fervent delight in his presence, which caused her to forget all other subjects, and to leave the domestic duties in which Martha was engaged, whilst she took her station at the feet of Jesus ; where she listened to his words, as they fell like refreshing showers upon her soul. This conduct excited in Martha a degree of displeasure, both against her sister and Jesus also. Her own heart would have

been equally gratified to have sat in mute attention to his word ; but it was requisite to make some provision for the entertainment of the Lord and his followers, and for this Martha felt herself responsible. Yet Mary could have assisted her : she thought her devotion ill-timed, and Christ's permission of her conduct an unkindness to herself. With some disorder of temper she gave utterance to these feelings, and was gently rebuked by the Lord, who observed that she was immoderately careful about many things, and that, so far from reproving Mary, he considered her act as the due expression of true faith, and therefore would not dismiss her from his feet. She seems submissively to have received and acknowledged the justice of this remonstrance. The next occurrence bringing this family before us, is recorded in John xi. where we find the abode visited by sickness and death. Lazarus was sick and died. On the first appearance of this indisposition, the two sisters sent to Jesus, acquainting him that he whom he loved was sick, and evidently expecting an instant attention to their distress, and a personal visit from the Lord. We have considered the conduct of Christ on this occasion, when looking to his history. Our Lord's arrival at Bethany was not as Martha and Mary had anticipated. To them he seemed to come too late, and to have been guilty of a breach of friendship. They were both persuaded, that had he been present, Lazarus would not have died. Martha, however, hearing of the approach of the Lord, went forth from her abode to meet him. She greeted him with an expression of feeling that evidently insinuated a reproach, at the same time declaring, that although Lazarus was dead, she believed he could still be restored, if Jesus would ask it of God. Jesus replied, by leading her thoughts gradually to centre in himself, as the resurrection and the life ; requiring also that

Martha should declare her opinion of him as to his person and power ; to which she gave a satisfactory answer, although it is manifest that a degree of darkness still covered her mind. It seems that our Lord sent for Mary, or inquired respecting her, and Martha hastened back to the house to inform her sister ; who, hearing that the Lord was near, rose up and followed Martha. The same expressions of emotion, reproach, and tenderness, were used by Mary, but she was evidently under a more impassioned state of soul ; her grief for Lazarus was more vehement, and her greeting of Jesus more ardent ; she fell prostrate before him. It appears from the history (verses 31 and 45) that the affliction of Mary exceeded in *demonstration* that of her sister. If, as we may suppose, she was much younger, or her brother had been, from more agreement in age, more her companion, this may be accounted for by natural causes ; or possibly she possessed a more ardent tone of feeling. When brought to the grave, an emotion of distrust rushed across the heart of Martha. She had before declared her belief, that even now Jesus could obtain the recovery of her brother ; but at this moment, the recollection of the state to which the dead body would probably be by this time reduced, shook her confidence, and she expressed her hesitation, calling forth a gentle check from the mouth of the Lord. Soon after the resurrection of Lazarus, our Lord again visited Bethany, when he was entertained in the house of Simon the leper, a man whom probably the Lord had *healed* of leprosy. There Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus. Martha followed her former employment, and was amongst those who served ; and Mary, taking this occasion to express her honour of Christ, and the grateful sense she had of his claims to all she possessed, brought an alabaster box, full of precious ointment, and opening it, poured the

fragrant ointment on his head, and anointed his feet, wiping them with her hair. For this act she was reproached by some present, especially by Judas; but our Lord put a high commendation upon her, declared that, in so doing, she had unconsciously given, by anticipation, an anointing for his approaching burial, and that wherever the gospel was preached, this act should be known as a memorial of her.

In Mary we discover a naturally tender and affectionate disposition. Her fondness for her brother, and her deep affliction at his death, are demonstrations that she possessed great sensibility and domestic qualities. On what occasion the powerful work of grace entered her heart, we are not informed. It is evident that the little band under that roof were all the disciples of Jesus, at the time when first mentioned in the gospel. The operation of the Spirit corresponded with her character, the Holy Ghost sanctifying her natural tenderness to a proportionable degree of affection in her discipleship, which she evidently preserved and expressed in a spirit of modesty and humility, that sheds increasing loveliness around her character. Her deep attention to the word of Christ, her lowly attitude, her loving preference of hearing him speak, rather than to have any other portion, her grateful consecration of the choicest possessions she had to the honour of her Lord,—are all evidences of a high state of spirituality, of a loving service from a will now sanctified to choose the good and abiding part. In her expectations from the Lord she was simple and confident; she believed that his love to them was true, and that he had only to know their necessity, in order to relieve it. Thus far, excellent dispositions of grace are conspicuous in Mary.

And what shall we say of Martha? Is there not an

equal manifestation of sincere devotion in her heart? Yes, assuredly. Her affections, her dwelling, her substance, her time, her exertions, were all consecrated to him whom she received as the Christ of God, and whom she delighted to honour. Her faith fixed in him as the Mediator; she believed his power in this office; she made him her refuge in distress; and, equally with Mary, confided in him, that a message would be enough to bring him to her home. Yet there are great infirmities discoverable in her. Even in her faith she was defective as to its extent; and therefore her expectations were limited, and doubts and misgivings damped its simple expression. The avocations of life, and domestic cares, had an injurious influence upon her. She seems to have erred, in the first instance, by seeking to make a too profuse entertainment for Christ, which manifested her own views not at that time sufficiently spiritual. She gave way to fretfulness of temper, rendering her service a burden instead of a pleasure. Under this feeling she was tempted to become selfish, was betrayed into censure of her sister, and with a presumptuous dictatorial tone, addressed to Christ, in a way very unbecoming her character and his glory. Yet over these defects Martha was strengthened to triumph. The irritation of her mind was allayed by the words of her Lord, and his rebukes received in meek acquiescence. She seems to have been much improved through experience and affliction. Under her domestic sorrow she displayed a collected and regulated mind and feeling, more vigorous than that of Mary. She also manifested an affectionate consideration for her sister, no longer complained of her excess in devotion, left her to demonstrate her love in the way most according with her character and desires in devotion, and humbly and devotedly continued to serve, whenever opportunity offered for this expression of her

faith. Martha appears to have been a character of great gracious worth ; honest, humble, active, domestic, and faithfully consecrated to the service of Christ.

We have no particular traits recorded of the character of Lazarus. We know that he was Jesus' disciple and adhering friend, a monument of his power, and an object of persecution ; as one in whom the Lord was glorified. We know also that he was a vessel of mercy unto eternal life ; for it is written, " Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus," John xi. 5.

How exceedingly interesting is this example of domestic peace and love ! and of that holy agreement to welcome Jesus, which is the greatest of all domestic blessings ! " It is the Lord who maketh men to be of one mind in an house." And whenever we behold it, we should admire the work of power, which can bring every varied disposition and character into this oneness of sentiment, and unite the affections of those who are bound by natural ties in the stronger cement of spiritual love. If it be thus lovely, as contemplated in others, what is it not as enjoyed by ourselves ! Little is it to be conceived, by those who have not this privilege, how such a blessing sweetens care, doubles joy, and opens a channel through which the richest advantages flow into each heart. Some differences of disposition and pursuit may exist ; but where *one* holy motive is as the heart or soul, giving impulse to the whole, there will ever be an indelible result of good and of comfort, in the highest sense of the word, to each individual. This should animate us to seek the privilege, and to promote it ; and cause us, in never-ceasing gratitude, to praise our God, if so he has cast our lot.

Let us endeavour to derive instruction from this

scripture history of a family so circumstanced ; it may teach us many profitable lessons.

In the first place, we perceive how important it is, to know how to give Jesus the most *acceptable* expression of love. This we learn from Mary. It is manifest that he delights in the expression of hunger after his word, of teachableness, of humility ; and that *his* judgment is that it is the *good part*. To this therefore we must yield our souls, cultivating a high appreciation of every opportunity when Jesus draws near in any spiritual ordinance, or invites us to come and hear ; especially in those sweet occasions for prayer, when we may approach him closely ; and when in a waiting meditative frame, we may sit in spirit at his feet, ready to feel, and admit, and welcome the Spirit's precious droppings upon the heart, who descends as the showers and the dew. By this holy alacrity, we should demonstrate, that our affections are severed from the world, and our tenderness consecrated to Christ.

In order to be in a state of preparation for these interviews, we must guard against all needless cares. This we learn from Martha. Not that we are to neglect domestic claims, or discharge them indolently, or reluctantly ; it is our duty to be diligent in every avocation as to the Lord ; and however comparatively contemptible the work may seem, it is capable of being exalted into the highest standard, by mixing it with the *grace of faith*. But we must not be *cumbered* ; we must not *multiply* our employments unnecessarily ; we must not be filled with anxiety about events, results, or external appearances ; but so regulate all our home concerns, and all our worldly pursuits, that they may never necessarily interfere with spiritual demands, nor ever expose us to disorder in our temper and spirit. It is necessary to watch against a snare of this kind, which not unfrequently creeps

into those very duties which we have undertaken for Christ. It is possible to multiply even religious occupations imprudently and injuriously, so as to encumber ourselves with a load of business that we are not able to discharge, and which tempts us at length to make encroachments upon time that ought to be spent in prayer and reading the word, and sometimes also to find fault pettishly with others whom we blame for not helping us out of what we have needlessly induced. In such a frame of mind, we are sometimes tempted even further than this; and are ready to murmur against the Lord himself, as if he were inattentive to our cares. Nothing will deliver us from this evil but increased spirituality in ourselves, through which we shall learn to moderate our earthly anxieties, to be less solicitous about accommodations for the flesh, to be more contented with our own *providentially* appointed lot, and more disinterested in our excitements respecting others, who may *seem* to be more privileged than ourselves, but who in fact are not so if we are living *to* the Lord. In domestic life these things are of great importance, because they exceedingly promote or impede the improvement of spiritual fellowship. And when believers live together, whilst they are ready to assist each other in all mutual cares, and to share the burden of every domestic concern, each should endeavour to understand their own peculiar calling, and walk in it diligently and dependently.

We constantly see, that the Lord's dearest people are not exempt from trouble. Sickness and death come alike to all; afflictions also of various kinds enter the very dwelling wherein Jesus delights to dwell. We do not estimate how much he loves us, by how little he tries us; because this is not the way in which he has taught his children to look for divine favour. Our part is therefore to be prepared for painful exercises; and not to be

offended, if in any instance they seem to exceed in measure and degree. We have the liberty of making known all our sorrows to his sympathising bosom, where we are welcome to rest with our heaviest load : and one short message, one ejaculatory appeal is enough ; he *hears* and he is ready to relieve. It may be his pleasure to prove us by apparent delays ; for these are means by which the graces of the Holy Spirit in us are called into action. Let us be watchful on these occasions ; for sometimes our native unbelief will operate, and bring us into despondency, even in the midst of professed expectation. There is in us a great similarity with Martha in this respect. We believe, and we appeal, as she did ; but perhaps at the instant, when faith should put forth all its simplicity, some sudden recollection of *improbabilities* ; or, as we reason, of *impossibilities*, will rush across the heart, agitate our soul, and suggest a thousand doubts and fears. This was the state of Martha as she stood by the grave of her brother. And she, who a little before had declared, that even now Jesus could obtain relief for her if he would, begins to reason, that relief is not possible in such extremity. Is it not so with us continually ? And have we not reason to be on our guard, lest we relax our energies, or act as if the power of our Lord were under some *limit*. He has given us encouragement to exercise expectation in the worst cases of affliction and need ; since he has said, that if we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, we should say to the mountain, ‘Be thou removed,’ and it should obey. O let us with simplicity and truth say, Lord, all things are possible with thee ! When afflictions are of a domestic nature, we as believers have a great duty to discharge. We should strive to regulate our own griefs, lest they become excessive, and lest we distress our beloved associates, by adding to their weight. The buoyancy of our

own faith should be charged to the work of seeking to sustain and comfort our companions ; we should mutually sympathise, but carefully resist words and deportment, that would spread increase of gloom upon the scene, or prove a source of temptation to others, This is a lovely work for charity, which seeketh not her own ; and whilst in secret we breathe out our sorrows to Jesus as to a confidential friend, or in social worship unite in spreading the necessity before his mercy-seat, we should speak of his loving-kindness, and strive to animate each fellow sufferer in patiently waiting for his time to deliver. Surely in the midst of the utmost tempest of feeling, true love to Jesus will hear his voice. That voice may ever be described to the saint by Martha's words to Mary, "He calleth for *thee* : " and with such invitations to closer communion, we shall be ready to arise from our desponding thoughts, and hasten to his feet. The result of these sanctified afflictions will be increased views of the glory and grace of our Lord, and of his special love to our souls.

To these spiritual excellencies let us each be aspiring, looking forth from all earthly encumbrances, and through even our best blessings, to the Lord our Saviour ; seeking improvement through his loving rebukes, and such devotion of the heart, that we may visibly manifest how all that we have is consecrated to his service ; and that we esteem it our richest portion to be acknowledged by him.

PRAYER.

Most gracious Saviour, look upon us and bless us, as Thou hast done the favoured saints, whose course is recorded in Thy blessed word. To Thee we lift up our heart and voice, imploring such

manifestations of grace as are the rich portion of Thy children. We, O Lord, are not worthy such distinctions : but Thou givest them freely ; and as poor dependants upon sovereign grace, we are encouraged to ask the abundance of Thy compassion. Most merciful God, may we be a family united in the same bonds as those which made the house in Bethany so sacred an abode ; and mayest Thou ever find a welcome underneath our roof, whenever or in whatever form Thou shalt be pleased to come. We would be of one mind, through the operation of Thy Spirit ; O deliver us from every obstacle to this precious fellowship : and take away from us, Lord, all that would obstruct the use of this privilege. Make us lowly, sympathetic, and spiritually minded. Make us believing, patient, and persevering in waiting for Thee, and in expecting from Thee ; and when Thou triest us by sorrow, or sendest sickness or death, or visitest us with bereavement, poverty, or loss of any kind, give us the attendant influences of Thy loving presence, to keep us in a mind that is consistent with our union in Thee. We would have all our sufferings sanctified, and all our sorrows regulated ; and in the utmost extremity of endurance, we would still be leaning upon Thee. Lord God Almighty, this cannot be our privilege unless Thy present power be with us in the fire, and maintain us in the flood : otherwise we are consumed,—or we sink. O bless us with the unspeakable consolation of a supply of the eternal Comforter ; and make His visitations full of the strength and wisdom which we need. Keep us from those worldly cares, and those fretful dispositions, which militate against the spiritual life. O release us from those things by which we have fettered our own souls ; and put us into that path of liberty, which we may run in gladness of heart, following after Thee. O that Thou mayest have full possession of us, in our

whole affection, in our whole substance,—with nothing held back—with all consecrated to Thy praise. It is in this heavenly course we desire to fulfil our pilgrimage; and thus conducted and strengthened, that we would finally dwell with Thee. Extend these mercies, O Lord, to us in our individual and relative and domestic concerns; filling us with joy in the Holy Ghost, and steadfast faith in Thee, the only, the all-sufficient God. Amen.

PONTIUS PILATE.

Matt. xxvii. 2.

THE history of our blessed Lord leads us to the investigation of Pilate's character, who took a prominent part in those affecting events which closed the life of our Lord upon earth, and who was one of the instruments through which, whilst he was gratifying his diabolical passions, Jehovah wrought the fulfilment of his own eternal counsels. This man was a Roman, and appointed by the Roman Power to the government of Judea. In this office he soon rendered himself detested, by the cruelties, pride, and arrogancy attending his use of power. History informs us, that he perpetrated many abominable deeds of injustice and oppression ; and he is styled in the profane record a *base* man. One of the acts of cruelty which he committed is mentioned to our Lord. Luke xiii. 1. In his conduct during the period of our Lord's arrest and sufferings, he evidenced his subjection to depraved principle, and his familiarity with deeds inflicting torture, and wrought in crime. We have seen how Caiaphas, the High Priest, having declared that Jesus was worthy to die, sent him bound to Pilate, as the governor, and the legal judge in cases of death. Here our Lord was brought to another examination. And Pilate proceeded to investigate the cause, in order to discover on what ground he must be condemned. His first inquiry was, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" To which Jesus promptly replied that he had said the truth. Being further accused by the Jews, Jesus made no reply ; and Pilate marvelled that he should produce nothing in his own defence ; but, as we find Luke xxiii. 4, felt an inward con-

viction of his innocence, and declared that he perceived in him no fault at all :—this vindication of Christ calling forth more vehement accusation from the assembly. Pilate learnt that he was not in his jurisdiction, but properly should have been taken to Herod ; and being glad to rid himself of this question, he immediately sent him to Herod : a concession to that king, which exceedingly gratified him, and produced terms of peace between him and the governor. It appears from John xviii. 29—39, that Pilate was very unwilling to involve himself in this disputed claim of our Lord to the faith of the Jews. Herod had returned Christ back again to Pilate ; and it now remained for him to decide whether he should die or not. Luke xxiii. 11—15. He was persuaded of Christ's innocence ; he was sensible that the Jews had delivered him up out of envy ; and he also received a warning from his wife, who sent to him whilst sitting in judgment to urge him to have nothing to do with that just man, for she had suffered many things in a dream that day concerning him. These were all powerful checks, to which he could not be wholly indifferent ; and he laboured to accommodate matters, by proposing to inflict any chastisement short of death, and thus to release the Lord as an act of grace or favour to him. These proposals did but the more enrage the Jews, who cried aloud, that they insisted upon the full execution of the sentence. Luke xxiii. 16—22. By comparing the accounts given to us by the Evangelists, we find Pilate greatly agitated during this scene : *offended* in some degree at the supposition that he could have any particular interest in Jewish affairs, John xviii. 33—35, yet irresistibly influenced to wish to deliver the Lord out of the hands of the Rulers, and secretly alarmed by many of the words spoken by Jesus, especially his declaration that he had a kingdom not of this world, and was the *Son of God*.

He hoped that the accusers or multitude might have been moved by the sight of torture already inflicted, and would consent to dismiss further thoughts of persecuting this object of their malice, and therefore he scourged Jesus, and arrayed him in mock honour, with a crown of thorns and a purple robe, and gave him up to the buffeting and abuse of the soldiers, presenting him in this condition before the multitude, at the same time affirming that he considered him perfectly without fault. These efforts were all unavailing; and, finally, when the multitude cried out, charging him with want of loyalty, and that in justifying Jesus he was Cæsar's enemy, Pilate surrendered himself to what he now considered the necessity of his circumstances; and calling for water, he washed his hands in token of his deprecating the guilt of condemning the just, declared that he was innocent of his blood, and that they who required it were responsible for the act. Having so done, he sentenced Jesus, and delivered him up to be crucified. After the execution of the sentence, Pilate, according to the custom, wrote the title which was to be placed above the body on the tree, giving to Christ the very office and character he had claimed, "King of the Jews"—and refusing the request of the Rulers to make any alteration in the superscription. When solicited by Joseph to give him the body of the Lord, he complied; and also granted the desire of the Jews to have the sepulchre made sure and watched. For these affecting parts of the divine record we may read Matt. xxvii. 1—37. 62—66. Mark xv. 1—15. 42—45. Luke xxiii. 1—25. 50—53. John xviii. 28—40. xix, 1—16. 19—22. 38.

The year following the crucifixion of our Lord, Pilate fell under suspicion of treasonable practices, and in consequence was banished by order of Tiberius Cæsar; and his miserable soul falling into

deep melancholy, and hopeless despair, he speedily put an end to his own existence here, by falling upon his own sword; thus concluding his vile, miserable, and profitless career, and joining those wretched spirits in darkness with whom he had been confederate when in the body.

The character of Pilate proclaims its own infamy in such glaring colours, that we instantly perceive what he is without much investigation. His conduct as a Ruler being proud, oppressive, merciless; and himself the manifest slave to the most tyrannical passions, which ruled his own mind and heart, and led him into captivity and destruction. But although thus proud and arrogant, where he could rule, he was an abject soul, stooping to every meanness, and servile to all who could promote his worldly interests, or promise him personal safety; he was earnestly ambitious for promotion and favour amongst men, and quickly alarmed at the slightest intimation of exposure to peril or disgrace. It was under the power of this bondage to himself as a sinner, that he persisted in violating every principle of honour, and plunged himself into the guilt of pronouncing that sentence which he knew to be iniquitous. When condemning our blessed Lord, he like Caiaphas and Herod, resisted light; for although not so highly advantaged for knowing the particulars of Messiah's glory, he had an equal conviction of his innocence who stood before his bar, and proclaimed his sense of the righteousness of the insulted and accused Saviour. With so sure a persuasion, with so many misgivings of conscience, with such solemn warnings, all powerfully working in his mind, the offence was deepened to a fearful degree, and gives us full demonstration of the force of those corruptions by which he was resolved against the Lord. That he was meanly apprehensive is undeniable, since it was not in the

power of the Jews to extort the sentence from him, in any other way but by assailing him upon some vulnerable point, and inducing him voluntarily to comply with their desires. Of this the chief Priests and Rulers were fully aware ; and when every other experiment failed, they threw into the scale that decisive weight, which turned the whole current of his hitherto wavering purposes into their favour. *To be an enemy to Cæsar* was too perilous to his worldly interests and life, to be even *surmised* without an immediate endeavour to wipe the aspersion from his character ; and in comparison with this consideration, no sentiments of honour or humanity were allowed to speak.

Insincerity appears a prominent feature in Pilate's character. The whole of his pretended investigation of the cause, his inquiry respecting truth, his apparent desire for information respecting the expectations of Christ, his vain subterfuge when washing his hands, were all marks of this sin ; he was insincere to himself, to the Lord, to the Jews. He wished to keep all his proceedings under the *appearance* of justice, consideration, and innocency ; he courted the approbation and smiles of men ; and no doubt would gladly have been excused the necessity of taking any part in the determination of a question, which to him was involved in mystery, and which he had some superstitious dread might end in a way of trouble to himself. We may readily conclude that Pilate was an unhappy man, out of humour with himself, with the Jews, with the circumstances around him ; and, as we perceive through the whole history, carrying within him a restless sense of insecurity, and a painful conviction that he violated the law of truth. When we contemplate the final scenes of this miserable sinner, our hearts are touched with an affecting sense of the vanity of human devices, and of the sad infatuation blinding the mind of man. The wretched Pilate

was overtaken by the very evils he aimed to avoid ; and without any refuge from the burden and terror he became to himself, ended his restless tumult of life on earth, by the last desperate and fatal act.

It is *natural* to man to love earthly things. Advancement to posts of honour, the smiles of the great, popularity in the world, personal security and ease, are all objects to which we are more or less enslaved. This life is full of the business, cares, and crimes, which are interwoven with these devices ; and we are surrounded by the continual exhibition of the complete dominion obtained by present interests over the whole man. In the midst of these tumults, God seems to be forgotten, and creatures exist as if independent of the authority, or mercy, of the Creator. Thus one generation after another passes away, and individuals are too much engrossed by their own present concerns, to observe, either the folly of their deceived fellow creatures, or the retributive visitation of God upon the souls that have revolted from him. Every man follows the bent of his own inclination, and reaps the harvest of his own seed time, without the thought of what Jehovah has displayed of judgment in the beacons all around him. O let us not act this infatuated part ; let us not turn away unimpressed by the divine works awfully conspicuous in the consciences, bodies, estate, and condition of the rebellious ; but seriously ponder the way of our feet, and search into the movements of our own passions. Such examples should shed a solemn influence upon the mind, and fill our thoughts with the recollection of that truth, proclaimed by the Lord, “Thou hast sinned, and be sure thy sin will find thee out.”

It is possible for us, in a spiritual sense, to be placed in similar circumstances with those of Pilate. Here are many persons before whom Christ is, as

it were, brought for justification or condemnation. His kingly pretensions and spiritual doctrines—his sacred person and his righteous demands—are all presented, either by the word, or by Christian example, before the conscience, judgment, and affection; and the trial is made, whether he will be acquitted, or sentenced, by our soul. When Jesus is thus presented before the bar of the inner man, it is in the midst of carnal accusers. Satan, and the world, would criminate this Holy One; misrepresent his blessed character, pervert his sayings, and pour in the tide of false witnesses against him. A tumult also is felt within; conflicting passions being all in arms against the admission of his rights; and many emotions of heart and conscience remonstrating against the injustice done him, and the righteousness of his demands. Sometimes this internal tumult arises, as in Pilate, from selfish apprehensions, which alternately act upon the feelings of enmity, and of passing approval. To reject, or to accept, seems equally to endanger the interests of self. Either present peril or future punishment are to be encountered. In this state of mind an anguish of indecision the most terrible is endured within the heart. Insincerity is now frequently displayed. It is hoped that some accommodation between the contending parties may be effected; and therefore a line of conduct is adopted, in which there is a pleading for *delay*. Proposals are made, and concessions granted. So far will this insincerity extend, that many times *inquiries* are made, under the pretext of not being sufficiently informed upon the subjects of religion. First it is pretended, it is needful to know "*what is truth*;" and to be better furnished for the determination of the question that is agitated. This is done in order to postpone the final decree; such persons not being quite willing entirely to relinquish what the gospel proposes, or

positively to expose themselves to vengeance from the Almighty; and yet not in any measure reconciled to the notion of refusing, or acting contrary to the cry of the world, spiritual religion being unfashionable, and not the pathway to honour here below: friends of a rejected Christ being involved in the same disgrace, scorn, and contempt; and a decision for the cross being sure to affix upon the character, that such an one is not this world's friend. There seems to be a formidable host of evils in the way of an open avowal by which the Lord is justified; and hence insincerity will, as long as possible, put off the act by which it shall be publicly known, whether or not, the cause of Jesus, as reproached, vilified, and rejected by the world, is espoused. In all this delay, and fleshly indetermination, there is fixed alienation from the Lord. The hesitation is occasioned only by a selfish fear of what may be lost, or incurred, by at once rejecting the Saviour. And in such cases it ends, as it did with Pilate, in a wicked surrender of Jesus, and a resolve to hazard the sentence from God rather than encounter the scorn or persecution of the world. Even in this awfully deliberate agreement with the adversary, there is a new demonstration of the same spirit of insincerity; the mind shrinks from the avowal by which self-condemnation is fixed upon the conscience, and has innumerable subterfuges wherein to seek refuge from so painful a necessity; and will endeavour to discover wherein it may be possible to screen itself behind some *reason or motive*, which may appear to justify the rejection of the cross. Thus very frequently the blame is cast upon some circumstance, or upon what they plausibly term an *unhappy necessity* of their case, pretending that were they differently situated their conduct would be different. Thus they *wash their hands* in the foul waters which

their own lusts have provided, and boast of innocence. How many thousands are there in this Christian land deep plunged in this guilt of Pilate. How many who live under the constant sentence of self-condemnation resisted, yet found to be in the issue *irresistible* ; and in whom, notwithstanding fair pretences and smooth speeches, and specious arguments, the rankling arrow lives, and will live for ever ! The lying refuges of the insincere are but a partial and very temporary shelter from the misery that follows such violation of conscience. God pursues and will not weary in his pursuit. He overtakes and will not fail to punish. Nor is there out of hell a worse condition of punishment, than to be delivered up to the dominion of an accusing conscience, whilst the bosom is the seat of deep despair. In this way the Lord frequently demonstrates the folly of the man who has endeavoured to evade the force of the gospel, or who has lived in devices against the glory of the cross ; and, in addition to these internal pangs, sending in many instances the very evils which have been the subject of dread, causing the wicked to be taken in their own net.

The result of our inquiry into Pilate's character should be a confirmed belief that all conviction or inquiry, that is unattended by sincerity, is vain and condemning ; that the difference between spiritual conflict and the contention of jarring discordant passions of nature is essential, and should be carefully considered and understood ; that bondage to this world is the fetter of hell ; and that for the sake of our own immortal soul, it becomes us to be decided, espousing the Lord's name and cause, whatever may be the uproar of men against him, or the present inconvenience to which our perishing life here may be exposed. Let him, therefore, this moment receive the surrender of our whole

hearts, without delay, pretence, condition, or unbelieving calculations. We may trust him for the preservation of what we place in his bosom, for he will never fail his faithful friends.

PRAYER.

Most gracious God, in thy loving mercy and grace, vouchsafe us the sweet tokens of thy love, which we solicitously ask as the dearest portion Thou canst bestow. And since we esteem spiritual indwelling tokens more than all outward things, O grant us the Comforter, to testify to our hearts that Thou lovest us, and that we are Thine. We want to behold Thee and to believe in Thee, as our King, as our God, as our Saviour, and to be fixed in firm affection to Thee and to Thy cross. O silence within us every doubt and fear; and give us the stability which arises from real fellowship with Thee. We require Thy omnipotent power and grace in order to deliver us from the cowardice and insincerity of our nature; we need Thy new creating work to make us able to confess and adhere to Thee, amidst this tumult of earth and hell; and we acknowledge, O Lord, that unless we are thus privileged and strengthened by Thy Spirit, we shall fall into the snare of cleaving to earthly objects, and resigning Thee. It is not in vile fallen nature to love or own a crucified Redeemer; the world and fleshly ease and present interests are all that sinful hearts appreciate or desire. O wherefore then should we have hope of arising at higher objects, or of adhering to better paths, since we have the nature universally corrupted by the fall! vain is every hope, blessed Saviour, but what is built upon the vast provision made in Thee, by whom a new, a holy nature is imparted that shall be capable of reaching unto Thee. On this Thy

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covenant we cast our cause: we plead it before Thee, Lord, with importunity of soul : do not refuse our supplication : do not deny our humble prayer ! O mercifully bring us into the holy band of oneness with Thy dear self, and save us from the terrible condemnation of a double-minded man. Wash us clean, blessed Lord, from all the sin we have contracted, in Thy own precious blood. Let this fountain take away our guilt and uncleanness ; and O speak peace to us, that no fears or terrors, such as seize the guilty, may distract our minds. Harken, Lord, we earnestly implore Thee, and answer all our cries for Thy compassions' sake. Amen.

MARY MAGDALENE.

Matt. xxvii. 55, 56.

MARY MAGDALENE is evidently mentioned in the gospel of St. Matthew as a settled and regular disciple of Jesus ; but since she is supposed to be the same as the woman introduced to us in Luke vii. 37, we have the opportunity of considering her first entrance upon the holy service, in which there are many interesting particulars. Upon the occasion when our Lord accepted the invitation of Simon the Pharisee, this person entered the place where the company were assembled, and standing behind the Lord, began to denote that her attraction to that habitation was the sinner's Saviour ! She had the appearance of a penitent, being bathed in tears ; and, as they fell upon the feet of Jesus, she stooped down and wiped the drops away with the hair of her head. She had brought with her a box of precious ointment, with which she also anointed the feet of Christ. This act gave rise to many sinful reasonings in the breast of Simon, who, judging according to his own principles as a self-righteous pharisee, began to entertain the opinion, that Christ could not be a prophet ; which, had he been, he supposed would have ensured his rejection of such expressions, from one whose touch was defiling ; he therefore concluded, that our Lord was ignorant of the character that had now intruded into his presence. A powerful demonstration of Christ's ability to read characters, and to understand the thoughts of man, was instantly given, by the parable in which he sought to instruct Simon, and to shew him the sinfulness of his inward reasonings. This parable

we have already considered ; we will therefore return to the more particular contemplation of the sinner who occasioned it. She stood in the presence of Christ listening to his discourse, and rendered an object of observation to all by the direct reference of his words to her case ; but she received at the same time merciful tokens of healing grace ; for the Lord approved her expressions of penitence and love, and dismissed her with an assurance that her sins were forgiven. St. Mark describes Mary Magdalene as one out of whom Christ had cast seven devils, see Mark xvi, 9. And if she be the same as the woman in Luke, she was evidently a notorious sinner. She is supposed to have received her name from the city Magdala, wherein she was notoriously abandoned. It is possible, therefore, that the possession may signify her submission *spiritually* to the dominion of the Devil ; or he may describe her as one of those wretched objects literally possessed, as in other similar cases recorded in the gospels. However this might be, it is declared, that she was a subject of mercy ; and that the miserable bondage in which she was a captive to Satan and sin, was powerfully destroyed by divine grace. It is probable, that after the dispossession of the devils, she was agitated and afflicted by the sense of her miserable condition as a sinner. She was unas-sured of the pardon of her iniquities, and endured those internal distresses which are consequent upon the conviction of personal ruin : and that, under this state of mind, she followed Jesus to Simon's house, hoping to receive from him some confirming word of comfort. It is evident that at this time she was already dispossessed, full of faith, fervent in love, and broken in heart. The particular act by which she had been delivered, must therefore have taken place previously. From the time of her call, Mary continued a true disciple,

and became an interesting and prominent character. She ministered of all she possessed, to the necessities of Christ and his followers. Mark xv. 41. And in all those scenes of affliction which belonged to our Lord's last days upon earth, she was faithfully an attendant upon his steps of sorrow. In the awful scene on Calvary, she was one who at some distance stood to behold the last expiring agonies of her Lord. Matt. xxvii. 55. After the last conflict on the bloody tree, she stedfastly owned her rejected Lord,—followed his sacred body when it was to be deposited in the tomb,—watched by the sepulchre with a loving heart,—left it only that she might engage with others, in preparing a more costly burial,—arose early whilst it was yet dark, to hasten to the beloved spot, and attended by two of her friends, arrived there intending to wait the coming of the disciples, that they might thus shew honour to their departed Lord. We have in a former portion, compared the several accounts given by the Evangelists of these events. As it respects Mary, it appears, that when upon coming to the sepulchre, they found the stone rolled away, she left the two behind her, and ran to acquaint Peter, &c., and that they then all returned together. In the mean time, the other women had seen the angels, as Matt. xxviii. 2—8. Peter and John having looked into the sepulchre, returned back to their abode; but Mary remained, John xx. 11. The Angels then appeared to her, 12, 13, asking wherefore she was so overwhelmed with grief? To which her heart promptly assigned the reason, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." And turning from these, she perceived one from whom she hoped to induce a communication of what had become of her soul's beloved. She interrogated him with much respect, but avowed her intention

of claiming the body of her Lord. To this inquiry her gladdened heart heard the reply in that well-known voice which had been as music in her ears, and falling prostrate, she exclaimed, *Rabboni ! Master !* The glad tidings of the Lord's resurrection must however be quickly borne to the rest of the family ; and Mary's obedience and self-denial were put to the test. She was required to suspend her own enjoyments, and to hasten to impart her bliss to others. To this requirement she was cheerfully obedient. We have no further account of Mary ; but no doubt she continued in that blessed and holy fellowship, which connected the hearts of the first disciples so firmly together.

There are few characters upon record that possess greater interest or importance than that of this sinner, so eminently chosen to be a lasting memorial of the riches of divine grace. In her condition as a transgressor, she exhibits the frightful power of sin, which, in too many instances, bursts every decent restraint, and riots in bold effrontery before God and man. She is declared to have been a dwelling where evil spirits made their foul abode, and her passions were the chambers of all uncleanness and diabolical crime. She may be considered therefore as a public plague, and as one of the awful monuments of Satan's ruinous empire.

But abandoned as was this wretched sinner, she was not beyond the reach of that covenant power which the Saviour possessed and displayed. He, who came forth to bruise the head of Satan, could crush his dominion in the sinner's breast, and establish there a holy reign ; and never was this power more effectually evinced than in this case. The deep contrition of her soul bore proportion to the depth of her former depravity. She had no plea to offer against the execution of judgment

against her ; but the pressing necessity of her own misery, and love to him from whom she had already received demonstrations of mercy, brought her through every obstacle into the presence of him who might justly condemn, but on whose compassion she was willing to cast herself. With a mind and heart absorbed by these affections, she considered not the contempt, or resentment, probably awaiting her in the house of the Pharisee : she admitted not the fear of rejection from the Saviour ; her restless heart could know no peace, until assured of full forgiveness, and for the sake of obtaining this unspeakable blessing, she was willing to encounter every difficulty. In her conduct after having made her way into the dwelling, we behold the full developement of that genuine work of grace, which was wrought in her ; abasement, self-condemnation, contrition, love, reverence, consecration, faith, and an entire casting of the soul upon the will of the sovereign judge, with hope in those mercies which she believed might abound to her : these were great spiritual excellencies, and decisive marks of her already accepted state. The Holy Ghost had operated these dispositions ; Jesus had wrought a spiritual cure ; *much love* had been implanted in her heart, and her Saviour was her all. What she needed was an *assuring* operation of grace : such a witness to her interest in the redemption, as might relieve her from anxiety ; and such liberty of access to the Lord, as an abiding and acknowledged disciple, as should invest her with privileges possessed by other saints. For this her spirit groaned ; for this her tears fell ; for this she waited at the feet of Christ ! The blessing was hers ; and the Comforter diffused through her soul the sense of pardoning love.

We possess the most conclusive evidences of Mary's integrity, and of the real change wrought

in her principles and character. Her's is no doubtful case, no transitory excitement; the consecration of her substance was a fruit of grateful affection to her deliverer; and not only were her worldly goods thus dedicated to the service of Jesus, but her own personal dedication was equally decided. We find her surmounting all those things which might have arisen to deter a female heart from such open expressions of love: but herein she exceeded most of those who boasted a manly spirit. No terror of bodily sufferings, no calculations for personal safety, no dread of the soldiery or of the rage of the rulers of the Jews, nothing of timidity in the shades of night, in the region of death, ever moved her from the demonstration of her affection to the Lord. And this not as an act of duty, or the result of reflection only, but in the fervency of prompt and genuine love, which loses sight of itself in the object beloved. Such was Mary's wedded discipleship; undepressed by circumstances, unclouded even by the darkness of Calvary's night, her faith was simple, her love sincere, and the *experimental* sense she had of Jesus' love and power forbade her then to doubt. Her inconsolable mind was under extreme agitation when missing the body of the Lord; grief had evidently prevailed to a blameable degree; so that she had not a sufficiently clear apprehension of the extent of the mystery of redemption. Yet she did not dispute the doctrine of the resurrection, nor avowedly discredit the testimony that referred to our Lord's victory over the grave; her error consisted of giving way so exclusively to the one idea of having lost the body of the Lord, as to cast all other recollections into obscurity. In her it seems to have chiefly arisen from excessive love; and her consequent anguish swallowed up all thoughts but those which rested upon this present bereavement. That this was the

prevailing influence on Mary's mind is evident, since she expresses no surprise at the address of the heavenly messengers, and no hesitation as to the gardener's power to comprehend, without her detail, the subject of her inquiry and grief. We may readily comprehend how great must have been the proportion of ecstasy which would succeed the dispersion of these clouds—the perception of her mistake! Her short and simple exclamation, when addressed by her risen Lord, conveys much more of the fulness of her heart than the most elaborate account of her feelings; and we will not injure its touching effect upon our own hearts, by seeking to enlarge upon it. Rabboni! Master! bursting from lips the instant before bewailing his loss, and attended with prostration of eager gladness, such as is described in the simple narrative, as it came *from* the heart so it *penetrates* the heart, and speaks the testimony of devoted love. There is much excellent grace also in the ready obedience shewn by Mary to carry an immediate message to the disciples. No doubt she would have much to ask, to hear, and to desire from him whom she now again beheld, and affection would have tarried on the blissful spot; but charity to her associates, and delight in the Lord's command, governed her feelings, and brought them into the channel most acceptable to him. In all these particulars this precious saint must needs have an attraction to such as understand the nature of discipleship. Even to the natural mind there is something interesting in fervour so pure, heartfelt, and open: how much more to those who behold this example as the fruit of divine grace, and who see all this flow of feeling falling into one consecrated bosom, that of incarnate, everlasting love. It is in this light that we, who read the present history, should contemplate the example before us, and bear ever in mind that such records fail of their proper end,

unless they produce some individual application of the subject so recorded.

The example of Mary is full of humbling and elevating considerations. It is humbling to behold the condition of moral depravity to which our fellow-creatures may be reduced, and to know that this is our own nature, and so an affecting picture of what we are or might be. Assuredly we are all possessed by Satan ; and as assuredly there are too many instances wherein this subjection to the power of darkness is manifested, as it were, in a sevenfold extent. In whatever degree the internal dominion of the devil may be exercised, it is alike unto condemnation, unless the act of sovereign and saving grace be extended to us, as it was to the sinner now in question. There is not one wretched descendant from fallen Adam, who has any ground on which he may elevate himself above the vilest of the human race, because all are partakers in an alienated nature ; all demonstrate alienation by wicked deeds : and if any are preserved from the *foulest kind* of transgression, it is only because restraining mercy has been extended to them. Let us not therefore reason as Simon did ; the haughty ignorance of such self-justification being abominable before God, but rather abase ourselves, as vile in the Lord's sight, and calculate *justly* respecting the comparative debt of our own soul and that of other sinners. It is our interest to seek to be deeply impressed with our *own* lost and abandoned condition. This will not be difficult of proof, if we look candidly into our inmost movements of heart, or examine, by the gospel standard, the paths we have trod. These will assuredly demonstrate that we have wandered out of the way, and that we have obeyed the impulse of diabolical passions. We shall, in consequence, come to the conclusion, that we need, in order to salva-

tion, or *dispossession* of the powers of darkness from our own hearts, and must be indebted for this act of grace to him who alone is the legal covenant deliverer from Satan.

But it is possible that we *have* experienced this wondrous deed of power and love, and yet, like Mary, may not possess that lively assurance which assuages the anguish of a convinced soul. There are many in this state. But we should not rest in it, as if it were *all* which as sinners we can expect, or as if the Lord were not ready to give a more blessed sense of liberty. We should follow the example of Mary, and resisting those temptations to false shame and fear of man, which would obstruct our purpose, we should press for a closer interview. Seek the Lord by open expression of our penitence, of our devotion, of our gratitude, and of our faith. In this holy avowal of the change wrought in our desires and affections, we shall usually meet the blessing which the Lord is ready freely to bestow; and be privileged to walk in peace, under the manifest tokens of the redemption and life that has been given. It is in this sweet sense of Jesus' forgiving love, that we find increased delight in a consecrated life. We love to minister to him in his body the church. We love to make choice of the paths that he was accustomed to tread. Although they are marked out in shame, sorrow, and death, they are the favourite abiding scenes where love fixes the heart and mind. And notwithstanding Jesus is now passed into the heavens as the Lord over death and the grave, the spirit will continually frequent those blessed scenes where salvation was accomplished for the soul. Here Jesus will many times reveal himself with peculiar power. His omniscient eye beholds us as we weep or watch. When disconsolate, he listens to our sighs, and will chase all these clouds, and dry up these showers by the sudden revelation

of his own victory over all the powers of hell *applied with power* to the soul. Thus, again and again the same scene occurs in its spiritual import ; and an interview, not less enrapturing than that which Mary had, gladdens the waiting saint. Hither then let us hasten, loving to frequent the scenes where Jesus manifests his love ; and whatever may be the particular experience through which we are passing, bring it to the presence of the Lord, that it may be sanctified to clearer discoveries of his kingdom to our faith.

PRAYER.

O BLESSED Lord and Saviour, the supreme object of faith and love to such as have felt Thy power to save, we bless Thee for Thy great and gracious deeds to the fallen and miserable. We adore Thee for every instance of Thy redeeming grace. O that we may individually be amongst such as know Thee in this character, and bring Thee the fruit of Thy own victories in our devoted hearts. Grant us, we beseech Thee, the divine operation by which all the power of Satan may be cast down within us. O dispossess the evil one, and come and take Thou the throne of our hearts : there reign in us and over us, most blessed Saviour, claiming us as Thy property, and owning our prostrate souls. We lament the many transgressions which we have committed. We are sorry for that accumulated load of guilt which we have been laying up upon our own heads ; but we cannot undo what we have done ; and alas ! Lord, we cannot in days to come do better, unless we are helped by Thee. Thy blood alone can blot out the handwriting that is against us ; Thy indwelling Spirit alone can enable us to walk in newness of life ; we therefore implore the revelation of Thy grace unto

and in our souls, beseeching Thee, Lord, to bring us into reconciliation and peace with Thee and with Thy command. Grant us, O Saviour, the *sense* of Thy forgiveness. O let us not go mourning in uncertainty along our pilgrimage, but cheer our broken hearts, and dry our tears, by speaking peace in the Spirit's power. We want that consolation which flows from the appropriation of Thy mercy ; we wait for the Comforter whom we desire as the constant witness in our breast : O give what we want and wait for, and own us for Thine own disciples indeed. May it please Thee to strengthen us in all that remains of our journey home ; keep us ever treading in the steps marked out by Thee. O do Thou bless us when we watch and wait beneath Thy cross, or nigh Thy grave ; and let us hear Thy voice as our *risen* Lord, hail Thee as our Master and King, and rejoice in Thy triumphs over hell. Shed abroad within us, blessed Lord, these unspeakable and soul-refreshing joys, and quicken us, by these blessed means, in every act of obedience to Thee and charity to men. All which we ask for Thy mercies' sake. Amen.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA.

Matt. xxvii. 57—60.

THERE are some interesting characters mentioned in connection with Mary Magdalene, whose devoted affections led them to similar demonstrations with her, of their love to Jesus, under the last scenes of his continuance upon earth. Mary the wife of Cleophas or Alphaeus, and Salome the wife of Zebedee, are particularly specified. To these we give the tribute of affection ; but, since the last acts of love to a crucified Lord were so much like those we have considered in the last portion, it is not necessary to stay further in the investigation of their character ; and we pass to the view of Joseph of Arimathea. This man occupied a high station in life. He was an honourable counsellor, or member of the Sanhedrim, the highest council of the Jewish nation, Mark xv. 43 ; he was also a rich man, Matt. xxvii. 57 ; he is likewise described as “ a good man and a just,” Luke xxiii. 50 ; he was necessarily present in the general assembly when the counsellors met together to consult for the death of Jesus ; but he consented not to the counsel and deed of them, Luke xxiii. 51. The fact was that he was himself *secretly* a disciple of Jesus ; he was persuaded of his person and kingdom, for he was amongst the number of those Israelites who were waiting for the kingdom of God ; and he looked for the fulfilment of his hopes in Jesus of Nazareth. These expectations, however, he durst not openly avow, for he feared the Jews, John xix. 38. What he was too cowardly to confess during the life of our Lord, he was bold to acknowledge in the circumstances of his death ;

and no sooner were the expiring moments of the Lord concluded, than he shook off his fears, and standing forward openly before the nation, entreated of Pilate the gift of the Saviour's sacred body. Having obtained his request, he, with the aid of Nicodemus, took it down from the cross, and wrapping it in clean linen conveyed it to Joseph's new and unoccupied tomb, which he had prepared for himself, but which, being situated close to Calvary, afforded a ready provision for this precious deposit, and was gladly consecrated to this service. This temporary burial was only designed as a present act of respect, and a security for the body, which the disciples unanimously resolved to honour with more particular attention after the Sabbath was past. Having completed this affecting work, Joseph and his companion returned to the city, waiting the destined period for their further expression of love and veneration to their departed Lord. In this act he was the honoured instrument of fulfilling that remarkable prophecy contained in Isaiah liii. 8, 9.

The external circumstances of Joseph were much against the prosperity of his soul as a believer in the lowly Saviour; his high distinctions, his great riches, his connection with the Jewish rulers, were all bad preparations for the reception of Him who came in the form of a servant, and was despised and rejected of men. When we take into consideration the *principles* of the men with whom he was in connection, we see the difficulties of his situation multiplied against him. Infidelity, corruption, and malice, were the governing passions of the rulers in general; and these were all in arms against the person and pretensions of Jesus. A tide of evil thus strong, and suitable to the native propensities of the heart, was calculated to bear him away in the same spirit of unbelief and

earthliness ; and not to assent to the opinions and determinations of the council, in a question of so much importance to the national interests, was undoubtedly to expose himself to scorn, persecution, and disgrace. Under all these disadvantages, however, an internal work of grace was going on in his soul. He possessed the preparation of an honest and ingenuous disposition. The works and character of the Lord had not passed before him unobserved ; there was an evident agreement between these and prophecy which he could not deny ; and his mind was the seat of conviction, the Holy Spirit leading him to compare the divine testimony with our Lord, and persuading him that he was the proper object of faith. Fettered and bound as he was by fear of man, he could not so far do violence to the dictates of his conscience, as to consent with the rest to the bloody machinations formed against the life of Christ ; and although he did not confess himself a disciple, he testified against their proceedings, and refused his vote or countenance to their decisions. So far he acted with a *degré* of conscientiousness ; but there was a criminal defect even in this principle ; he contented himself with keeping clear, as he supposed, of the crime of condemning the Just One ; but had he discharged the *whole* of the duty laid upon his conscience, he would not have been satisfied without professing his own belief. And there is an increase of sin in this cowardice on the ground of its *inconsistency* ; for he expected a *kingdom*—the kingdom of *God*, and he looked for it in Jesus as the anointed Messiah ; yet with all this exercise of faith and knowledge, he durst not venture to appear friendly to the claims, which, under present circumstances, were disputed by the great men of the earth. Thus he was awfully ensnared to withhold the testimony which he ought to have given, and grieved that Holy Spirit, through whose

grace he had been enlightened and won to faith in Christ.

The infirmity and sins in Joseph's character were not to be tolerated by the eternal Spirit. Jesus' subjects must confess their King; and accordingly this disciple was recovered out of the power of this snare of cowardice and fear. A season most remarkable was chosen for the manifestation of this grace; for when faith and love and hope were sharpest tried, then their genuine nature appeared. The very extremity of Jesus' sufferings and shame proved the occasion of awakening the courage and resolution of love; and now with generous fervour we behold the rich man—the honourable—voluntarily embracing the shame of the cross, and seeking a lot with that despised company, who henceforth had nothing to expect in the world but a share in the suffering baptism of their Lord. His confession was boldly made before the unjust heathen, who had surrendered the guiltless sufferer; his faith and love were made conspicuous to the Jews, condemning their deed, and justifying the murdered One,—when with reverential respect he drew forth the nails from the crucified body, and displayed his estimation of the person by consigning it with tenderest affection as a precious jewel to his tomb! Then his integrity as a believer was established to the glory of the Lord; his honours, wealth, character, and all were prostrated before the Lord; and in the very circumstances which, had he yielded to carnal reasonings, might have served to give him a plausible refuge from the dictates of his conscience, he most triumphed, receiving into his heart the crucified One, and still retaining his expectation of the *kingdom of God* in him!

The example of Joseph calls to our mind the frequent testimony of Jesus respecting the danger

of riches and earthly honours ; we are also constantly forewarned, that not many rich, not many noble, are called into the kingdom of Messiah. The circumstances, in which persons of this description are placed, will necessarily afford abundant opportunity for the assaults of Satan, and for the risings of such corruptions in the heart, as are peculiarly opposed to the cross. Such persons are also frequently thrown into associations the most prejudicial to spirituality. Their companions are amongst those who are absorbed in what present interests will afford, either of pleasure or pomp, or secular concerns ; and usually, in this current of thought and pursuit, the spirit of infidelity is very prevalent, and the whole train of feeling and sentiment diametrically opposite to the revelation in Jesus. Disciples of Christ are by these treated with contempt, scouted from society, represented as madmen, and all their peculiarities reproached as delusion. When men are accustomed to this style of conversation, or to these maxims of this world, they readily imbibe all the poisonous influence, for it accords with *nature* in us all ; and even what are called *good* and *just* men are frequently carried away by the stream, and act in things which respect *religion* as they would be ashamed to do in mere natural concerns. There are some subjects on which men feel a sort of pride in encountering reproach, from such as they know to be unjust or unprincipled persons ; and animated by generous feeling, they will encounter the insults or perils to which their conscientious proceedings will expose them : but religion is a topic on which even these spirits are found acting a dastardly and cowardly part. *Contempt for the cross*' sake is not what the heart is prepared to meet ; and the consideration of a man's high birth, high station, influence, &c. will be enough to shut his mouth to the subject, which he is convinced in his *judgment*

merits his interposition and regard. Is not this continually seen and felt? Are not general councils, state affairs, and concerns of the nation, conducted too much like the assemblies of the heathen, and without regard to the divine government or will? Is not a *saint* or spiritual believer in these assemblies looked upon as an object of suspicion, and his opinions and counsels passed by or despised? Does it not require great courage for a man in these circumstances to avow what he is to the *full extent* of his conviction? Is it not likely that he may be tempted, even whilst preserving his integrity so far as not to consent to counsels and deeds which he considers militating against Christianity, yet not to plead the interest of the Lord with that openness and decision which they demand? A candid reply to these inquiries will decide us in believing, that there are many who in these situations may be thrown into similar temptations with Joseph, and would confirm the fact that circumstances of this kind are not favourable to the manifestations of pure spirituality, and require an especial power of divine courage whenever they are maintained consistently. This consideration should make us content with the humble sphere of action, knowing that herein the Lord frequently dispenses his choicest gifts, rendering retirement, and a lowly lot, rich in the possession of true and manifest discipleship. And if the Lord has seen good to place us in the higher condition, we learn how great is the responsibility belonging to it, and how urgent the necessity of living upon God with peculiar nearness, that we may be preserved from the perils around us! If the conviction of the mind be of a saving nature, let not any man suppose he shall evade the shame of the cross; eventually he *must* be brought to bear it; so that his present subterfuges are only a disgrace to him, and will prove a source of trouble in his better mind, when

he will look back with sorrow and say, On such or such an occasion, I ought to have avowed my sentiments, my fear of *consequences* was dishonourable to my soul ! Very frequently the Holy Spirit will make trial of our sincerity, by bringing us into greater extremities than those from which we shrunk back, and will thus chasten us for transgressing, and lay the axe to the root of the tree, bringing down those abominations in us which have afforded strength to this temptation.

It is a very blessed truth, that real faith triumphs in proportion to the extent to which it is tried ; and that circumstances, which desolate and sweep away the hypocrite and deluded, serve to establish the true principle. Believers, who are fearful in the anticipation of a storm, are oftentimes most valiant when the tempest blows. They who have temporized, when matters were not brought to a crisis, have in the crisis cast in their whole force of mind and soul to the service of the Lord. And many who seemed to stand neuter, or who exercised their influence only as *moderators*, have been by the issue of the combat raised from their insensibility, and made advocates for Christ's cause. The praise of this is due to God alone, for the indecision of the heart has been a grievous sin ; but that God, who is faithful, will secure his honour, by bringing forth the affections of the regenerate into their suitable developement. The exposure of the church to heresy, scorn, sufferings, cannot be contemplated by the upright without awakening the flame of honest love ; and thus many, like Joseph, will be strengthened to surmount their fears, will profess themselves on the Lord's side, and will cast in their lot with the despised disciples, even when sorrow and clouds are darkest round their head.

Let us use this example as a profitable lesson to us whatever be the condition of life we are ordained to fill. The question of first importance is, are we

in *any* sense disciples? Much goes to the satisfactory answer of this investigation. It is not the having a name amongst the baptized that will identify us with the spiritual body. We cannot have passed attentively through the several parts of God's word without being convinced that something beyond this is necessary. Our examination is to turn upon the *inward* man. We must see if we have a discernment into the nature of Messiah's kingdom equal to that which Joseph had—if we are waiting for this kingdom, and understand its divine character? There is a divine kingdom in the *earth*, vile as the world is become! Jesus is the heir of all things, and will carry on this dominion to the summit of that glory, which as Lord and Mediator he will secure to himself. This is that same dominion which is set up within the hearts of the redeemed, and which Jesus will also complete. And there is a glorious result in the everlasting world, when the mediatorial kingdom shall be perfected, and God be all in all. Is this the kingdom of God for which we wait? And have we firm conviction of mind that it will be established by and in Jesus? To be able to answer in the affirmative is a great privilege, yet even this is not all. If it lead us only into that measure of discipleship which *secretly* prevails in the mind; if we are contented to go so far, as merely to keep free from the grosser violation of the christian requirement—what are we but like the cowardly Joseph? The *Lord* has no glory in us; our regularity, temperance, moderation, are deemed to be fruits of natural benevolence, or human morality. Men will call us good, and just, and we may retain our human distinctions, untarnished by the reproach of being a *disciple*. This cannot be admitted. Self-satisfaction must be dismissed, for God is not satisfied. The Spirit's grace is not sufficiently appreciated; and the work of his mercy in the breast

lies under the grievous depression of its power. We know that "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world;" we therefore must overcome. And since it is through faith that the victory is obtained, we must have this principle so developed, as to demonstrate, that the Lord worketh mightily in us, by Jesus the apprehended king, making us more than conquerors. 1 John v. 4, 5. There is an indiscribable enjoyment known by the soul, when once it comes forth boldly to the confession of the faith. Sometimes indeed we may be called to manifest our love by works of a very painful description. We can readily understand with what mingled feelings Joseph would extract the nails from the lacerated flesh of his beloved master; and how, whilst he would discharge this act with as much reverence and emotion as if the unconscious body were still susceptible of pain, his own frame would irresistibly shudder at the thought of that agony, which a little while since had been inflicted through those hands and feet. In a spiritual sense, we also may have such painful duties devolve upon us, since the *mystical* body of the Lord is still exposed to bloody, murderous, persecuting, tumultuous men, who from various motives and in different forms are continually driving in the nails; so that in this respect the church may say, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." It is our part as true believers to own this body, and, as much as is in the power of a spirit of peace and consistency to effect, to labour for the removal of those evils which the ungodly have cast upon it. If our faith and love are genuine, we shall thus walk; and in the path shall gather pure delights, unknown in any other course. We can also now look to our own tomb as consecrated to us; our surety having entered the gloomy prison, and passed from it as a justified representative, henceforth it is rendered to us a bed of rest and sleep.

As death has lost its sting, so the grave is stripped of its terrors and captivity ; and every true Christian is privileged to anticipate the period, when he will lie down in the dust, with a joyful sense of the deliverance wrought by his Lord. He is *grateful* for such a hiding place for the weary body ; and he is *exulting* in the persuasion, that ere long the grave shall yield up its treasure, and Jesus be acknowledged to the utmost extent of his glory, “the Resurrection and the Life!” Now in this world let us then confess him, glorifying him as the portion of our soul. He will ere long confess us, and be admired and glorified in all who believe.

PRAYER.

O MOST merciful Lord and Saviour, consider us, we humbly pray Thee, as the accepted worshippers, who bow at Thy feet and adore Thee, and who would embrace Thy command and follow Thee. O grant us the anointing power of the Holy Ghost, by whom we may be enabled to appropriate Thee in Thy true glory, as Lord, and Life, and King. We wait for Thy kingdom, desiring to see it established in the earth ; and we long to behold it in the mansions of everlasting glory. But O show us the necessity of having it exalted in our own hearts ; and make us fervently to wait upon Thee for its spiritual triumph in the inward man. O Saviour, direct us into a clear and spiritual understanding of the extent of this blessed empire ; and let us not be at rest without a perpetually increasing possession of the fulness that flows from Thee. O make our understandings full of light, our hearts full of love, our lives full of devotion—and grant that we may confess Thee in a consistent and laborious faith. We bless Thee for those compassions which we have received from Thee ; for the mercy that

has preserved us to this hour, and that now disposes us to call upon Thee. Surrounded as we are by infidelity, by scorners who profane Thy name, and by persecutors who abhor and oppress Thy disciples, we are sure, O Lord, that if we suffer with them in spirit, it is owing to Thy grace ; and if we dare confess Thee in the sight of men, it is because Thou puttest courage into our hearts. The whole is of Thee, O Lord, as the Author of all preventing and of all saving mercies. Vouchsafe to receive our grateful tribute ; and O give us our rest and joy in Thee as our never-failing strength. Make us, O Lord, amongst those who are bold to avow Thy cause, even when it is most vilified and reproached. Let not the shame of the cross deter us from standing forward to plead its interests : but help us, we pray Thee, in our desires to be instrumental in affording a shelter for the outcast church. O we would that Thou should'st use us, blessed Lord, in the services which love and charity may demand ; and that those affections, which we cannot now demonstrate to Thy own body as when Thou dwelt on earth, we may express towards thy blood-bought family as precious members of Thyself the living head. And give us the comfort of knowing that our grave shall be hallowed, and a place to rest in for a ransomed body. Help us to triumph in Thy resurrection, and to believe in Thee as our surety, so that when we are called away from earth, we may die in the Lord, our flesh resting in hope, and our spirits received to thee.— Answer us in mercy, O Jesus our only Lord. Amen.

LUKE, THE PHYSICIAN AND EVANGELIST.

Luke i—iv.

THERE are few things recorded of St. Luke : nevertheless he is one of the most important characters introduced to us in the New Testament ; being one of those instruments chosen by the Holy Ghost, to transmit to all ages the history of our blessed Lord. He is generally supposed to have been a Syrian, and to have become acquainted with christianity in Antioch. Yet he speaks of himself in the first chapter of his gospel as having had perfect knowledge of all things *from the very first*, which would lead us to suppose that he might be associated with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry, or one who had opportunity to observe the whole progress of the kingdom, from its first entrance into Judea in the person of Emmanuel ; however this may be, he was evidently a man of firm faith and devotion. He was by profession a physician, and appears to have been a man of education, talent, and of a classical mind ; probably, he at first continued in the calling to which he had been providentially appointed, receiving the truth and living as a disciple ; but afterwards he evidently entered the profession of christianity in a more public capacity, was engaged in the office of the ministry, and particularly attached to St. Paul, with whom he continued in association to the close of that apostle's life. It is from the pen of St. Luke, that we have " the Acts of the Apostles : " in which history he speaks of himself as one with Paul, in all that history of labor, persecution, and affliction, to which he was called, see chap. xvi. 5—10 : xv. 1—6 : xxvii. 1.

2 : xxviii. 7—10. Paul mentions him as his faithful companion, and with great affection. Col. iv. 14. 2 Tim. iv. 11. It is also evident from the passages referred to, that Luke exercised his ministry, as a preacher of the gospel in these travels.

Scanty as are the materials from which we may gather information respecting this character, they are sufficient to afford us the evidence of a blessed operation of grace. In this example the Holy Ghost was pleased to shew how omnipotently he can effect his own work, in characters of various kinds, and in various stations. The mind of Luke highly cultivated, engaged in science, and devoted to habits and pursuits perfectly distinct from the avocations of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, was equally accessible by the Lord, as were the less polished talents and powers of the poor fishermen : and when the effectual grace of the covenant reached him, his heart was as willing to acknowledge Jesus' sway, and to leave all and devote himself to his cause. Pride, human reasoning, interest in the good opinion of the world, professional success and acceptance, were all laid at Jesus' feet, and he presented his all to be disposed of according to the divine purpose, being satisfied with a portion amongst the saints. We cannot wonder that he should find a peculiar gratification in being associated with Paul, whose education and natural taste would most probably afford a degree of congeniality in this respect ; he seems also to have had kindred ardours, being willing to encounter any peril, suffer any loss, encounter any hardship in the service of Jesus Christ. There is a particular degree of modesty in this eminent disciple, which should not escape our observation. It is remarkable how much he succeeds in keeping *himself* out of sight, whilst he gives importance

and prominence to all others, who were engaged in the labour of love. So much is this the case, that we have to *inquire* also who that person could be who pens the interesting record? And never does he display even his fellowship with the apostle, but by a kind of necessity belonging to the detail of history wherein he was always an eye witness. This is the more remarkable on account of his natural ardour and sanctified ambition, which must have been great, or he would have declined some of the perilous scenes he entered. Usually dispositions of this description are defective in the spirit of retirement, unless, as in the case of Luke, strongly sanctified and deeply experienced, and glowing with simplicity. One instance of this we may refer to, in Acts xvi. 13, 14. On that occasion, *Luke* was evidently one who spake to the women assembled by the river side; but he passes over his own work, and immediately testifies of *Paul's* acknowledged word. Many similar instances occur in the history, and are very interesting traits of character. Yet with all this modesty, he had a just sense of his own gifts and distinctions, which, as he had received them from the Lord, he could with consistency declare, when occasions required it. In his opening of the gospel, he speaks of his "*perfect understanding*" of those things which were believed by the saints; and with full confidence of the Spirit's faithfulness to him, as an inspired witness, he enters upon his important work for the edification of others. The motive he assigns for addressing Theophilus, is worthy the spirit of a zealous friend. He esteemed this man as excellent—one in whom the Lord was glorified; and he delighted in addressing him, that he might be instrumental in preserving him from error, and confirming him in those things wherein he had already been instructed. In the midst of his fervent friendships and strong

natural feeling, he evinces a disinterested impartial soul; his history is according to the Spirit's dictates; and he records the whole course of his dearest earthly friend, and of the company of disciples without prejudice, neither exaggerating the good, nor palliating the evil. In what manner St. Luke finished his christian course, we are not informed; but in that part of his career as a cross bearer, which is contained in the Scriptures, we have sufficient evidence of his saving interest in redemption; and we are therefore sure that he now rests with the blessed above, having finished his race with joy.

We know not to what high and responsible station the Lord may design to elevate any of his creatures, until his gracious and mysterious providences unfold his secret counsels; but of this we should always be persuaded, whenever he bestows *talent*, it is our duty to cultivate it with industry. The early habits of Christ's people, before they are called to the knowledge of himself, may be very different from those with which they conclude their life; but the culture of the mind is a valuable acquisition, even in the testimony of that simple gospel, which rises in native majesty above the *need* of having human powers, of learning, eloquence, or classical attainments. We are cautioned against trusting in the wisdom of this world for the furtherance of the christian cause, and we are to beware of vain philosophy; yet the Spirit will take these into the service when it pleaseth him; and by sanctifying them in the vessel, will frequently render them instrumental in meeting the arguments, exposing the fallacy, and overturning the imposing pomp of the speculations and opinions of the sceptic, the infidel, and the vain reasoner. The simple untutored argument of a believing *rustic* is *omnipotent*, when

used by the Holy Ghost ; whilst the learned disquisitions of the most refined education are all impotent when unowned by him. But we are not to despise learning and science in their proper place ; for when they sit at the feet of Jesus, they are excellent weapons in his hand. Let us therefore, in the case of ourselves or others, give diligence to improve the measure of ability which God as a *Creator*, has bestowed ; for possibly, as a *Redeemer*, he may intend to call it forth in his service, consecrating it to the cross. It is however dangerous ground on which we tread, when we are vigorously pursuing those studies which are scientific, or lead to learning. Thanks be to God, we have had, and have, men of erudition, whose energies have all been under the anointing of the Holy One ; but in too many instances, vain man is puffed up by his little store, begins to count himself something, surrenders his mind and imagination to wild theories, presumes to attempt to reduce even the Divine Being to what may be comprehensible, studies cause and effect until he forgets or denies the First Great Cause, and finally makes his human learning a step into infidelity, so making not only shipwreck of faith, but of the soul likewise ; for usually these *perish* in their own deceivings. With what caution therefore should the studious mind pursue its interesting course ; and how should the friends, and guardians, and tutors of such minds, vigilantly watch the progress made, and promptly check the inquiring spirit, that would presumptuously or boldly speculate in things above human reason. Perhaps the observation of most persons will justify the remark, that if there be any body of men more particularly exposed to this peril than another, it is *medical men*. This might seem surprising, considering their constant opportunity for seeing the most awful visitations from God, and of visiting such a

variety of death-bed scenes. But the fact is, that familiarity produces insensibility : and that even with the humane and sympathetic, there is such an absorption of the attention to the bodily malady, and such a customary confidence in skill and medicine, that a *practical* infidelity is displayed, the Great First Cause is not in the thoughts, eternity scarcely occurs to the mind. And may we not honestly say, that it is a rare instance to find a physician like Luke,—one who will make the sacrifices he did, or who, retaining his calling as a physician to the body, has faith, integrity, or feeling enough to become a physician to the soul ? This is lamentable on many accounts. If it arises from personal ignorance, scepticism, or infidelity, it is a woeful condition ; for it is sin against abounding opportunities for information, and for the awakening of reflection. If it arises from carelessness, cowardice, or preference of worldly interests, it is a ruinous sacrifice of Christ before the idol self, or the god of this world. This sin must produce dismal chastisements from God, either here or in the future world. In its bearings upon the sick, it is also an evil much to be lamented, since a physician has so much in his power, which is denied to every other attendant upon a dying bed. There is a kind of instinctive drawing of a sick man's heart towards a kind physician ; he is accustomed to listen for his voice, to hail his approach, to long for the day to dawn, that he may consult with him for relief and ease to his suffering body. If he be enabled to impart relief, gratitude flows freely out to him ; or, if he cannot help, his good will and patient endeavour to do so, insensibly gives him an interest in the heart. Now had such a man courage and faith, how favourably is he circumstanced for suggesting the necessity of seeking relief for a more fatal disease, of looking for the great physician, of

seeking preparation for the opening eternity that is soon to be entered; and were this done judiciously, and dependantly upon the blessing of the Spirit, how might he hope to be waited for, and hailed as one who bringeth good tidings, and of whom the sick sufferer would say, "How beautiful are his feet." The friends of the sick will likewise admit the helper for the body when all others are shut out, and may be willing to receive counsel respecting their dying relative, sooner from him than from other christians; their own hearts are generally softened at such moments, and the natural enmity of a sinner against true religion, is under at least an external restraint for that season. Were the physician a man possessed of the gospel in his own heart, and animated by the zeal which lived in the soul of Luke, he could do much in these situations; and perhaps might have the comfort of hearing from the lips of those who survived the sick patient, that although he could not prevail to ward off the dart of the king of terrors, he was instrumental to spoil him of his sting, by having directed the eye of faith to the Lamb of God. So important is such a calling when viewed in a true light, that, unless by special providence, directing such an one to a more exclusive dedication of his time to the ministry, we might say it cannot be exceeded, it should not be left. These are of the most blessed, and amongst the most serviceable of the Lord's witnesses; and may look for the large proportion of his faithful supply of his Spirit. O then, how truly will they rejoice in venturing reputation, and in consecrating talent, leaving it with their Lord to determine how much of worldly good they may thus enjoy, and rejoicing that with other cross bearers, they too have something which they can offer in sacrifice to their faith, something wherein they are privileged to shew that they can *trust* the Lord.

We may bless our God that the efficacy of divine grace will be manifested in every example of the Spirit's work ; carnal fetters are broken by him ; the sinner is constituted Christ's *real* friend ; so attached, he will love, follow, and serve his heavenly master, as and where he may appoint ; and in *whatever particular* calling will demonstrate that his affections are knit to the saints, and that he considers them " the excellent of the earth."

When a converted soul is united to the family whose lord and head is Jesus, the principle of union is wonderful in its strength and continuance. In some particular instances, believers have been called to evince this, by an intimate association with such as are special objects of the world's and Satan's hatred ; they may be so again, and Christian love is firm enough for the requirement. In proportion to our simplicity, we shall esteem it a privilege to participate in the reproach or affliction of a saint who suffers for *Christ's* sake ; and, like St. Luke, we shall gladly cast in our lot with such chosen vessels. It is a comfort to ourselves if we can administer comfort to these ; and we cheerfully go with them to face the scoffings, revilings, and persecutions of the world, or to attend them to prison and to death. We are contented, in this fellowship, to encounter storm, to hazard life, **and** to give our affectionate and zealous witness to their message and their course. This gracious disposition will be accompanied with modesty, if we are deeply experienced. The Christian friend, without obtruding himself upon notice, finds the most heartfelt satisfaction in rendering his beloved associate the conspicuous object. Especially if he believes that the Lord has been pleased to dispense an eminent calling, and put a singular honour upon that head, his generous affections rejoice in the distinction ; and whilst his own spirit owns and rejoices in a peculiar sympathy and congeniality

with his companion, he would not rob him of an honorary tribute, nor seek to compare his works with what the Lord has given to his friend. It is impossible sufficiently to express the loveliness, excellency, beauty, of this disposition; and he, who seeth not as man seeth, looks upon such self-denying fruit with a peculiar favour. So that although we will not depress the high standard of Paul's devotion, in order to elevate St. Luke, we must confess, that to the Lord the spiritual excellence of the latter was possibly equal in degree; and that, in the after instances which occur of similar fruits, the same gracious acceptance will be granted.

Let us from this character endeavour to derive that measure of influence upon our own hearts, which may be practically and experimentally proved; let us seek the divine baptism with a just sense of its value; and by the power and grace of our Lord endeavour to cultivate our own vineyard after these lovely patterns. Our Lord will be glorified by our efforts, for he will smile upon and bless them. Here in this vale of tears, we shall possess internal enjoyments exceeding all calculation; and when Jesus maketh up his jewels, we shall be admitted into the number of those whom he has prepared for glory. Let it be for him to determine in what particular way we shall be so prepared; and let it be our part teachably and gratefully to cherish all his loving visitations to our soul.

P R A Y E R.

ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, our secret affections, our bodily powers, and all our mental abilities are known unto Thee. Thou art the Author of all—Thou understandest all we have or

are. We spread before Thee every talent, and all that we possess, gratefully blessing Thee for the gifts whatever the measure may be. But we come to ask of Thee the sanctification of what Thou hast bestowed, that we may possess Thy mercies in the covenant of redemption, and be consecrated unto Thee. Blessed be Thy name, that we have been taught to estimate the things imparted to us by Thy bounty, as chiefly valuable in reference to the kingdom of Christ; and that to be spent in his service, and used in furthering the knowledge of salvation, is in our judgment the highest exaltation of man. Confirm us in this judgment, O Lord, and enable us, when individually tried, to prove that we are sincere in what we profess. Be our station ever so high, or ever so low, make us faithful in it; and may we know what it is to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. Animate us, O God, with ardent simple love; O kindle on the altar of our hearts that never-dying flame; and grant that it may consume within us the dross and corruptions of our earthly nature. Blessed Lord, let us not be enslaved to men; let us not be the bondservants of the world; deliver us from seeking or loving filthy lucre, and make us contented to receive the proportions of this world's goods which Thy infinite wisdom shall allot. We would have it our great ambition to walk close to Thee, to listen for and obey Thy voice, and to be found faithfully witnessing of Thee in all situations. And may we love, own, and be associated with Thy eminent saints, firmly adhering to them and Thy cause, and venturing all things in this high fellowship. If we, O Lord, are privileged to have access unto sick or dying beds, impart to us a faithful disinterested mind; let no consideration of our selfish interests prevail to hinder our efforts to save a soul from hell. Never let us hesitate or

delay in a matter of such awful import ; and whether sinners will hear or forbear, give us grace to discharge the sacred duty, that no man's blood may rest upon our head. O God, make us tenderly sensible of the value of an immortal soul ; awaken our holy sympathies towards the departing, who are about to enter the unknown world ; and endow us with prudence, discretion, resolution, tenderness, and dependence, that we may speak as we ought to speak. And O may we find an open door, and be blest to the salvation of sinners' souls. We beseech Thee to pour this Spirit upon all who occupy the station of physician to the mortal body. Raise up within them the kingdom of Jesus, and constrain them by love to him. And give them, in this their peculiar ministry, the presence of the Comforter, sustaining, directing, and cheering them in the life of faith. We implore Thee for these mercies in the name of our dear and blessed Lord. Amen.

ZACHARIAS.

Luke i. 5—25. 57—79.

ZACHARIAS, the father of John Baptist, was a Jewish Priest, officiating in holy things, and distinguished by a life and conversation corresponding with his station ; for he, and his wife, walked in all the ordinances and commandments of God blameless. According to the custom of the Jews, which set apart an officiating priest chosen out from the rest to take his regular part in the discharge of public duties, Zacharias had his week allotted him ; and whilst thus engaged was visited by the Angel Gabriel, as we have already seen in the view of John Baptist's character. This heavenly message was sent with tidings, intended to cheer and animate his faith ; he informed him that his supplications were heard and accepted ; that as a token of divine favour his wife should bear him a son, who should be the promised forerunner of Messiah, and at whose birth many would rejoice ; he then proceeded to give direction as to the training and nurture of this child. The first emotion in the breast of Zacharias was that of alarm ; at the sight of the angel, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him ; but having recovered from this agitation, he began to express his doubts of the accomplishment of a promise, which he conceived to be beyond the reach of probability. For this distrust he was chastened, being visited with temporary loss of speech and hearing ; but the *promise* was repeated. In this situation he remained until the birth of his son, when the Lord by his faithful power delivered him from restraint ; and he opened his mouth, speaking forth the praises of God in a

high strain of inspiration, and testifying of the accomplishment of that covenant promise for which Israel had so long waited, and by which at length the day-spring from on high had risen upon the nations. At the close of this sacred testimony, he turned to the infant, addressing it with prophetic words declarative of the office he was to fill, as the prophet of the Highest, who should exercise a preparatory ministry, opening the way for the manifestation of him who is the true light and the eternal life.

The circumstances in which Zacharias was placed as a Priest in the sacred temple, were highly advantageous ; but we have had perpetual proofs, that they were not always used in a spirit of holiness, or made subservient to the interests of the soul. On the contrary, they were perverted to spiritual pride ; and, by the generality of the Jewish priesthood, turned into occasions of delusion and self-righteousness. But this man was one in whom spiritual discernment prevailed ; a child of God, and eminent in the paths of obedience. The description of his devotion, along with that of his wife Elizabeth, who was his faithful companion in the Lord, gives us a very extensive view of his spirituality. They were both righteous before God, they walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. No words can be more comprehensive ; they embrace the spirit of *integrity*, the affection of *simplicity*, the *habit* of obedience, the *universality* of that obedience, its extent to the *moral law*, and its delight in *religious institutions*, and the spirit of uprightness ; so that there was no *allowed* defect in any of these paths. Such elevation in the profession of faith is sufficient to establish the certainty, that these were the true saints of the living God, and that external privileges were enjoyed with internal appropriation

of the blessings of the great salvation. professed and typified in the various services which they observed. This also appears to have been a course long and faithfully pursued ; for they were both now "well stricken in years."

The angel witnesses to Zacharias of the gracious acceptance of his prayers. He had been engaged in offering up the typical incense on the altar, whilst the congregation were presenting their prayers without the temple ; his *own* prayers had ascended with the incense, and Jehovah had received the tribute. One blessing, however, was granted, which it appears from the history he neither asked nor expected ; and which, when voluntarily engaged by the Lord to be given as a distinguishing mark of divine favour, he had not a heart prepared to believe. Eminent, therefore, as was the life and devotional spirit possessed by Zacharias, he was exceedingly defective in that faith, which was required at the time of the revelation. We cannot condemn him for that degree of agitation which troubled his spirit, when he beheld the angel. Supernatural appearances of this description are alarming to men who are yet in the body ; and it was natural that Zacharias should be afraid, notwithstanding his high spirituality, and his liberty of access by faith into the divine presence. But, it is evident, that a sinful degree of unbelief had taken possession of his breast ; his inquiry was not the teachable desire of information, but the expression of incredulity ; otherwise it would not have exposed him to so severe a rebuke and chastisement ; and this offence was doubly culpable in him, because his profession and experience were sufficient to have reminded him of the divine power, and of the believer's privilege. The correction, however, seems to have been borne in meek submission, and to have been sanctified to the furtherance of his soul in the heavenly life ; a blessed evidence of which

was publicly given, when it pleased the Lord to release him from the rod ; for immediately, when his tongue was loosed, “he spake and *praised* God !” Thus we perceive, that he had received the affliction upon his own body with the disposition of a child ; he acquiesced in the visitation as righteous, he justified the Lord in thus marking his displeasure against the sin of distrust. And when he was pleased to dispense the deliverance, he accepted it as an act of *sovereign* grace, for which it became him to utter a song of thanksgiving. His restored speech was also consecrated to a prolonged and exalted strain, embracing the glorious work of redemption in its comprehensive character. He raised his lofty tone to the everlasting throne of Jehovah, blessing him as the Lord God of Israel. He adored him as descending from the heights above, bringing redemption to his people. He celebrated the fulfilment of the promise made to the house of David. He realized the accomplishment of all former prophecies in the establishment of the horn or the dominion of salvation. He understood and proclaimed the extent of this dominion, which would save the ransomed from their enemies, and from all oppressors, which would bring a people forth to serve the eternal God in the liberty of adoption, in the sanctity of true devotion. All which mercies he rejoiced in as the fruit of the oath of the covenant, as the manifestation of the truth of the Lord. Thus his own domestic joys, and his own release from correction, were subjects almost lost in the higher delight he experienced, whilst contemplating the rise, spread, and triumph of Messiah’s kingdom. Not that he forgot his own infant babe : in him he beheld an object of deep interest, even on the same ground as that which had hitherto engrossed his tongue ; and whilst he turned to him with affectionate and grateful love, he most rejoiced in the spiritual privileges to which

the child was born, and the high ministration to which he was ordained. These are precious features in the new creature, and elevate Zacharias as amongst the most distinguished of the redeemed family.

The precious character of a real believer, in all ages of the world, is represented to us in the excellencies which distinguished Zacharias ; and we are required to examine the statement with a practical purpose, not contenting ourselves merely with historic facts, or with the exhibition of spiritual beauty in a fellow creature. Our own personal and individual concerns demand attention ; and our relative influence should be taken into consideration, teaching us the desirableness of having a just standard before us, and of seeking to form the Christian character according to the divine rule. In the subjects of grace there is but one divine operation, whose energetic covenant purpose prosecutes the wondrous work of conforming the soul to Jesus Christ ; and therefore we must always look for the same fruit as to quality, although the quantity may greatly differ. Internal sanctity, heartfelt acceptance of *every* commandment, constant attendance upon divine ordinances, and the risings of humble prayer, will be characteristic marks of a state of grace ; which, more or less, we possess from the beginning of our discipleship, gradually advancing in the stability and measure of our spiritual productions. This is a course of holy walking which constitutes the delight of the new creature, since it leads him into all those precious regions wherein the Lord his salvation is found ; and the discharge of *duties* is not, as might be supposed, the effect of a selfish fear, or the consequence of well-formed habits ; but arises out of the new existence which has been given, so as to be the spontaneous acts of life and love. Every

believer is a priest in his Christian privilege ; he is consecrated and set apart by the Holy Ghost, to offer spiritual sacrifices to the Lord ; and his life is a continual fulfilment of this distinction. He has the grace and spirit of prayer, of praise, walks before God in perpetual offerings, according to the daily or hourly requirement which awaits his steps ; and were the hidden exercises of his soul visible, we should find him unceasingly engaged in the work of secret sacrifices offered upon the divine altar, Jesus Christ. It is his *unsuspended* lot, always to enter the temple ; the covenant has made him free, and brought him into the blessed liberty of having constant admission to serve at the altar. Whatever is typified in the law, is verified to him. And he has the abiding access even into the holiest, by that new and living way, which Jesus has consecrated for us through the veil, that is his body. Here he is also privileged to offer the incense of his Saviour's merit ; he has appropriated the work of salvation in his righteous Redeemer, and looks for acceptance in his all-sufficient obedience ; and with this precious provision, he delights in presenting his constant prayer. In these circumstances, can we wonder that there should be special seasons, when more intimate communion, more sensible acceptance, and more immediate manifestations are enjoyed ? Unquestionably, the Scriptures lead us to expect that such shall be the gracious demonstration of favour, which Christ extends to his waiting people ; and we may rationally put forth our faith into expectation of the blessing, since so many before us have lived to prove the Lord's loving kindness in this respect. We look not for visions and revelations made to the senses ; but we may, and ought to look for internal revelation, such as may bid us *not fear*, and assure us that *our prayer is heard*. It is by this holy access, and close communion in the Spirit with the Lord, that we

attain to the standard of real Christian devotion, being before our God righteous, obedient, impartial, devoted ; and yielding our whole being to the delightful pursuit of the heavenly the narrow way. To this let us press, loving the elevated standard, and seeking to reach it in the sufficiency derived from Christ. After all living by faith in the meritorious incense of his merit, for justification unto life.

How lamentable is the truth, that, even in these eminent believers, there is frequently a degree of unbelief on some particular points, which might justly surprise us, were we not acquainted with human nature, and the vanity and weakness of man even in his best estate. We find ourselves able perhaps to credit the promises in general, or particular promises which lie within the range of probabilities ; this we had to observe in many past characters, but there is a difficulty before us when an *improbability* is made the subject of promise. This is very sinful ; it is a limitation of our expectations, which is dishonourable to the infinite perfections of Jehovah, and inconsistent with the history of his ancient wonders : which he has caused to be recorded for the sake of the confirmation of our faith, showing us what he *can* do, and what he *will* do, for such as trust his name ! Our unbelief is also a grievous injury to ourselves : we are invariably chastened for it, not only in the experience of our soul which suffers a consequent depression, but in the visitation of chastisements, which are sent to demonstrate how we have fallen below the proper standard. Sometimes the correction answers in a spiritual sense to the experience of Zacharias ; and the grieved Holy Spirit withdraws for a season those former delights which we possessed, when hearing the word, or that liberty with which we once uttered the praises of our King ; a kind of woeful stupefaction succeeds—our spiritual

energies seem paralyzed—and we bear about with us the painful conviction that this is because we believed not the word. Yet so merciful and gracious is the Lord, that even in chastisement he remembers mercy; and will not extend correction to his child without accompanying it with his own sanctifying grace. The conviction of error is received with humility—the nature, measure, and continuance of the correction accepted with submission, the period of trial rendered profitable by the secret influences of the indwelling Spirit, who is faithfully working in the soul, and giving more confirmed and simple views of the divine faithfulness. This merciful effect produced, our ever true and gracious Lord will fully and freely return in the manifestation of his own unchangeableness, and by restoring the suspended enjoyments which we had forfeited, give loving tokens of his compassion and grace. Let us not *presume* upon these mercies; the legitimate use of God's unchangeableness is to produce in us greater reverence and vigilance; an effect that will follow, if we are genuine believers. Every season, wherein we are passing through such experience, should be attended with corresponding tributes to the Lord; and our restored privileges be embraced with the song of praise. Our sanctified use of the power of speech should especially break forth, so as to justify our Lord, to tell of his wisdom and truth, and to celebrate the riches of redeeming love; and unquestionably there will be an open spring within a bosom so visited, from which the flowing energy of love and faith will burst forth.

Happy are we, if by the Spirit's grace we are acquainted with those truths, which are the subject of inspiration spoken of by Zacharias,—if in an experimental heart we are treasuring up the testimony of Jesus, knowing it to be liberty and life; and happy is it for us, if, in this knowledge, we are

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walking under the day spring from on high, and labouring to give the same benefit to our fellow sinners! Our privilege is great if used personally to celebrate the cause of redemption—the fulfilment of the oath to Abraham; and not less should we rejoice, if in the providence of God we are appointed to be friends or parents of such as are thus *great* in the eyes of the Lord. Let us be sensible of the greatness of such a distinction, rejoice in seeing those near and dear to us engaged in these high services and preparing the way of the Lord by a faithful testimony; and by every effort of love, example, prayer and encouragement, seek to promote their simplicity and consecration; thus we may in our several capacities evince the mind of Zacharias, taking warning by his unbelief not to distrust the Lord; but deriving from his gracious affections an exciting example in the way of devotion to the Lord.

PRAYER.

ETERNAL Lord and Saviour, visit us, we pray Thee, with the manifested purposes of Thy love towards us, and let our waiting spirits now meet Thee in Thy willing demonstrations of grace. We earnestly covet the smiles which Thou givest to Thy beloved children, and long for such sure tokens of favour as they possess. We ask not for visions and revelations made to our senses, for this is not Thy present method of speaking to saints; but we ask for the voice of the Comforter, that we may hear him in the inward man, and be assured by His witness to our souls. We pray Thee to bring us into that habitual course of devotion—into that sacred fellowship with Thyself, which distinguished the believers of whom we read in Thy word; for we long after the paths of righteousness, we wish

for the steadfast beauty which adorns *Thy diligent* obedient people, and we would attain to that measure of the fulness of the stature of Christ which should make us blameless, guiltless of allowed transgression, and without guile ! Not that we look for perfection in ourselves, blessed Lord ; for in our best estate we are full of weakness and vanity ; but we desire that ripened state of experience, and integrity of profession, which shall glorify Thee, and in which we may have the Spirit's witness. Give us these blessings, O our gracious God, and teach us as Thy dear children, whose voice Thou wilt hear with delight, and whose cry Thou wilt answer. O do Thou give us such faith in Thee as will trust Thy every promise, and such courage in coming to Thee as shall bound forward to Thy every call, and such persuasion of Thy power to do more than it enters into the heart of man to conceive, that we may never be shaken in our belief, however marvellous Thy purposes may be. O may we never grieve Thee so as to induce correction, or to bring a mingled cloud with the brightness of Thy salvation towards us ; but rather ever give us tongues loosed by the Spirit to speak and sing Thy praise, inspired by Thee to tell of redemption in the highest strains. We beseech Thee to make us able witnesses of this glorious cause ; and bid us rejoice in beholding the prosperity of Emmanuel's name in the earth ; and may we seek to animate each other in the blissful way, proclaiming the approach of the highest—the Lord our Redeemer ! Grant us a gracious answer to these prayers, O most blessed Lord, for Thy compassions' sake. Amen.

ANNA.

LUKE ii. 36—38.

THERE is little of historic matter contained in the Scriptures respecting Anna, yet sufficient to demand our attention, and to induce us to rank her amongst those who call for prolonged and affectionate notice from the friends of Jesus. She was evidently a person well known, at the period in which she lived, as eminent for devotion and for the possession of the Spirit's special gifts. Her age was extreme : it is generally supposed that the fourscore years and four, mentioned in her history, were those which *succeeded* her widowhood ; and if so, she must have advanced beyond a hundred years in the pilgrimage of this life. She is described as spending the whole of her life in holy services, being a perpetual worshipper in the temple of God, exercising herself in fastings and prayers, and occupying the office of a prophetess to the people, probably in the *highest* sense of this calling ; but certainly as a teacher, who was received and acknowledged by those amongst whom she testified of spiritual truth. It was her privilege to enter the temple at the time when Jesus was brought there by Joseph and Mary, and along with the aged Simeon to give her witness of the blessed infant as the promised Messiah. The prophetic Spirit rested upon her ; and whilst she uttered her praises to Jehovah, for the accomplishment of the promise, she spake of Jesus to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem ; by which we are led to suppose, that the remainder of her public calling was discharged in a lively testimony of the Lord, particularly addressed to

the remnant of believers in the city, who with herself were waiting for the manifestation of Christ.

The private character of Anna, as a believer, stands very high even by the limited evidence which we possess in the record ; for it is manifest, that she was one of those who supremely loved and consistently glorified her Lord. Jehovah was enthroned in her affections ; her widowed heart had found a refuge in her God, and in him a satisfaction and fulness, which satisfied her soul. We are not informed as to the beginning of her spiritual existence, or as to any of those exercises through which she had been brought to simplicity and the consecration of herself to the Lord's service ; possibly through trial and the early bereavement which she suffered, of her human dependencies and domestic joys, she might be led into the more particular course of devotion ascribed to her in the history. In it, however, she demonstrated perseverance, fervour, self-discipline, and a holy delight in the sanctuary, which probably she not only loved, as the place wherein the saints were called to proffer their accepted sacrifices, but as affording her an opportunity for speaking to those who were met together there, and urging upon them the blissful requirements of the Lord. It would appear that her labours had been graciously blest. There were those to whom she was evidently an honoured and accepted witness. And the nature of her instructions may be gathered from the theme on which she delighted to expatiate when Jesus came. Before this blessed advent, the eyes of faith and expectation were open, *looking for* redemption*. This then had been the subject familiar amongst the saints, and enforced by Anna ; so that when the promise was accomplished, it only remained for her to direct the attention of believers to this

babe, as the unspeakable gift—the redemption of man! We must however believe, that from this period she would experience a fervent increase of her own affection, and a blissful confirmation of her views; so that her laborious testimony would be fed, as it were, by a new and freshly flowing stream, and her aged body also feel the invigorating energy derived from such divine manifestation. We must suppose these effects to have taken place in a heart and mind like Anna's, blest as she was by the manifold operations of the Holy Ghost, from whom she was beautified with personal holiness, and consecrated with peculiar gifts for the benefit of men.

How blessed are they whom the Lord will thus distinguish by an inheritance in himself! External circumstances are then all sanctified; and however extreme may be the dispensations of trial, the everlasting arms make amends for all. The circumstances of widowhood are frequently those of great distress. When persons have been united together in true affection, the dissolution of the marriage tie is necessarily one of extreme affliction, and, in many instances seems, *naturally* speaking, to consign the bereaved one to lasting sorrow, so long as the earthly scene is continued. Sometimes the stroke which breaks the heart, breaks up also home, property, and comforts of various kinds, and the widow having lost her constituted earthly protector, becomes the prey of the oppressor. These evils are an addition to the distress of the natural affections. As years advance they are felt the more; for unless the temporal condition of such an one is attended with provision that lifts it above dependence and want, the infirmities of age will expose the widow to greater trial. When we contemplate such occurrences by the eye of *sense*, we consider them depressing and painful, and number

them amongst the events of life that are calamitous. But how different is the view presented us through the vision of faith! Natural affections are more lively through the Spirit's work, but they are *sanctified*. Losses, bereavements, oppressions, infirmities, and age, are all therefore received with disciplined feelings; and although the sense of sorrow is great, the resignation of faith is greater. Believers are grateful for those human ties and domestic enjoyments, which the Lord is pleased to bestow; but they are not *necessary* to the peace of the soul. A child of God has no absolute necessity for any thing but what is in God; and as *he* cannot die or be impoverished, so his child must always have a living joy and a sure inheritance. The blessings are received as loans, held in dependence, relinquished when called for, and the very affliction which is endured under the sense of a loss, is overruled, to bring the heart into a more entire consecration to the Lord and his service. The approach of bodily infirmity is also, under the influence of this holy devotion, contemplated without complaint, and its infirmities are cheerfully borne. The very decrease of the strength of the tabernacle becomes a subject of pleasurable reflection, since it is a token of the approaching period, when the burden of earthly cares shall be laid down, and the vicissitudes of this life be exchanged for one of abiding rest. Such is the privilege of believers in this vale of tears, in the most retired walks of life. And in proportion to the publicity of their calling also, the Lord will be glorified in them, giving his own measures of grace or of gifts, according to the lot ordained by him, and in every instance ripening the soul in the heavenly life, according to the blessed arrangement which is proclaimed in his word,—“They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing;

to shew that the Lord is upright." Psalm xcii. 14, 15.

A lively and vigorous state of soul will lead the pilgrims into every scene where the object of faith may be beheld ; and we shall find the saints, like Anna, delighting in the sanctuary, and devoting every hour, which can be conscientiously given to the service of the Lord, to this high pursuit. Ordinances must always be sacred and dear to the believer, for they are appointed means by which greater discoveries are made of the great redemption. Here, therefore, the fervent heart waits before the Lord, looking for those revelations which are to confirm and enliven faith and hope, and gratefully contributing to the celebration of the praises of the everlasting King. This may be done by united worship, singing Jehovah's name, and giving the witness to him, which is done by a faithful attendance where his people meet. But it may be the Lord's pleasure to appoint some of his children to a more public and peculiar mode of witnessing to his glory ; and in these there will be required the vigorous use of the talent to the end ordained. God has been pleased to raise up a constant succession of teachers in his church, by whom to convey to the body the grace of edification ; and not unfrequently this has been from amongst females, who, like Anna, have had grace to consecrate themselves, and have also been endowed with gifts which have constituted them prophetesses or teachers. We have had occasion ere this to inquire into this grace. The examples of Miriam, Huldah, Deborah, are decisive ; and Anna is one in whom the ancient promise contained in Joel began to be displayed, proving a kind of first fruits of the divine engagement respecting gospel plenitude in this respect, and seeming as if designed to link together the witness of the Old with that of the New Testament, that

upon our daughters the Spirit of inspiration should be poured forth, and that they should prophesy. The *degree* to which this gift may be possessed rests not with us, but with the Lord, who is the sovereign distributor of his own possessions : but it is our duty to understand what measure we have received, and to occupy our talent faithfully until the Lord come. Let us not therefore exhaust our precious time by disputing as to the right which Jehovah exercises in elevating females into this rank ; none can deny that he has done it ; none will deny that it is a prominent gospel promise that he will do it again ; none can contradict that the Spirit prescribes rules to the female, whereby she is to discharge this gift ; and it is a more profitable occupation to us to be looking to the discharge of our responsibility on this subject, whether we may be amongst such as speak or hear. In the example of Anna, we are taught that the end for which this gift of prophecy is given is to *speak of Christ* ; agreeing with the voice of the scripture witness in all which we testify of him, and shewing forth what he is ordained to be to his redeemed. There is no method so effectual to the attraction of sinners as that of exhibiting an incarnate, crucified, risen Deliverer. This is a subject which is best calculated to touch the obdurate heart of man ; therefore to these we should faithfully testify of Messiah. There will also be a remnant *looking* for redemption. The Holy Spirit maintains the work of grace with power, and awakens the affections of the heart towards the great objects of faith and love : to these it will be a blissful occupation to speak of him, who in his own grace and blessed name fulfils all they look for. Tidings of the desired Deliverer will be as healing balm to every wound, as sweetest honey to the longing appetite, and as refreshing cordials to the weary pilgrim. If we have hearts touched by the Holy Ghost, if the

sympathies of Jesus live in our breasts, there is no personal delight that can equal what is felt, whilst meeting the affections of such souls and speaking of Jesus. O then let us supplicate, that he, from whom the gift first proceeded, may come and breathe on the flame, calling it forth in our hearts, so filling us with individual experience in the things of Christ, as to produce an increase of relative zeal, and by his own mighty presence in us to render our witness of his redemption vigorous, full, and effectual.

Whatever may be our measure of spiritual influence, let us be encouraged by the example of Anna, to use it in faith; but ever remember the necessity of living also like her in personal dedication. If we are in temporal circumstances such as will admit of abundant leisure from worldly avocations, let the time be spent in the service of the Lord, with an earnest desire to be ripening for the world of glory. If we are poor and obliged to labour for our bread, let us redeem time by diligence, and the discipline of the body, for the exercises of devotion, and the exhibition of a life of faith. Let us bear in mind that there is a great responsibility belonging to an *aged* disciple. These should receive the younger to edification, speaking to them of him whom they have found faithful, showing that their aged days are days of praise and thanksgiving, and that even when pressed down by infirmity of body the subject of *redemption* can reanimate their frame. And let us also, if living to such an advanced pilgrimage, strive to cheer the companions of our days of failing nature, rejoicing in the interchange of holy sentiment and expectation of future glory, which it is the privilege of such long tried souls to enjoy. This probably would be a refreshing repast enjoyed on many occasions by Simeon and Anna. O may we thus ripen for eternity, and thus fill up our days of time *in the Lord*.

PRAYER.

MOST blessed and merciful God, Thou art the great and glorious source of all mercies, the unchangeable Friend, the powerful keeper of the feet of Thy saints, we look unto Thee for the impartation of every blessing that is contained in such covenant characters, imploring that we may find Thee to us full of sympathy, full of compassion, full of power ! Help us, Lord, to obtain the high condition of those who are kept in closest fellowship with Thyself ; bless us with communion in the Holy Ghost, and enrich us with the salvation by which sinners are elevated into the privilege of being Thy servants, children, and friends. We are prepared, O Lord, to expect, that in a world so full of trial as this, we must meet with tribulation, and have our lot with sufferers ; from these, O Lord, we would not shrink, knowing as we do that they are permitted by Thy infinite wisdom—have been produced by our own transgressions—and may be sanctified to us by covenant mercy. Only do Thou impart the needful supply of grace, which may make us teachably to submit, and lovingly to look unto Thee. We desire to be dedicated to Thy service ; if this is to be effected through earthly griefs, let Thy will be done. We are assured that there is no portion in this world equal to what is found whilst the soul is living in the intimacy of faith and love with a manifested Saviour ; and that in our life, where day and night Thou art sought and served, there is a present high inheritance beyond all price. O vouchsafe to place us in this privilege, and to enrich us with Thy hidden peace. We ask Thee likewise to endow us with a measure of influence, and with gifts from the Holy Ghost, which may render us useful to all around us ; and

whether it be to a greater or less extent, O make us witnesses of the object of our faith, that we may speak of our Lord, and extol his redemption from experience of his love. Thus ripen us, O Lord, for eternity. Thus bring us on our way until we come to our grave like a shock of corn that is fully ripe, and then gather us into Thy heavenly garner, and fill us for ever with redemption to the glory of Thy name. Amen.

SIMEON.

Luke ii. 25—35.

AN aged and eminent believer is here presented before us. Simeon is described as just and devout, and that his soul waited for the manifestation of Messiah, as the *consolation* of Israel. The Holy Ghost abode upon him ; and by this heavenly comforter he was assured, that he should not depart from the body before he had his eyes gladdened, by the sight of this desired Messiah. At the very time, when Joseph and Mary carried the infant Jesus to the Temple, the Holy Spirit directed Simeon also to ascend to the sanctuary ; and when he beheld the blessed babe, he immediately took him in his arms, and with a fervent offering of gratitude, blessed God ! He was now ready to depart ; his eyes had seen Jehovah's salvation ; his soul was the mansion of peace ; and he rejoiced in the glory that would result, not only to Israel, but to the Gentile nations, by the rising of this blissful light upon the earth. Having thus, in the first instance, worshipped the Lord, he next addressed himself to Joseph and Mary, particularly the latter, to whom he spoke prophetically of the person of the infant Jesus, showing her for what she must look in the accomplishment of those promises which were sealed in him ;—that he was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and as one who would be rejected of men, thus making manifest the secret workings of sinful human nature against the *spiritual* promise ; and that she herself must be prepared for enduring great affliction ; for a sword would pierce through her own soul. From this scene probably Simeon returned home full

of thanksgiving ; and soon finished his earthly course, entering into the perfection of peace, in the bosom of the eternal God !

Notwithstanding the state of national declension, which prevailed in the minds of the people of Israel, it is joyful to behold what eminent individuals were raised up by the Spirit, in whom the true church was constantly preserved in the earth. We have had several examples of the holy dispositions for which Simeon is recorded amongst the upright in Israel ; and rare as are the excellencies of spiritual devotion and justice, we find them existing, even in those dark days, with a more than ordinary lustre. In the strict observance of all that these gracious dispositions describe, Simeon found a delight only to be known in the way of holiness ; yet his ardent affections looked for something beyond even these enjoyments, and rested upon the revelation of the great salvation for his soul's consolation. He had lived long in a tumultuous world, he had witnessed much of evil in his nation, he had experienced the trials incident to human life ; in these, no doubt, as a believer, he had found his only and his sure rest in the promises ; these were pure springs of comfort, and to them his faith turned with lively appropriation. But he knew that there was a further revelation which Jehovah had engaged to bestow upon men, and in which the earth would be gladdened by the accomplishment of types and promises ; and for this his spirit breathed, herein evincing, not only the strength of his faith, but the extent of his charity ; for he was willing to remain in the body until he might witness the dawning bliss of Israel, the approaching liberation of the heathen. The extent of his faith was very great, and highly spiritualized ; for it seems that he well understood, how the glorious Redeemer would appear amongst men. Prophecy had not been

studied by him through the obscurities of prejudice and pride ; he expected the Saviour as the promised *child* : he was not offended when his parentage was lowly, and his condition in this world poor and abased ; looking through all the exterior of Christ's humiliation, he realized in him the great deliverer, and in the humiliation beheld, with acquiescent faith, the fulfilment of the prophetic testimony. The energy of his faith was also richly imbued with glowing gratitude ; he blessed the Lord for the unspeakable gift ; he anticipated the joy of thousands, who would taste the liberty brought to light by the gospel ; and in reference to himself, he experienced and proclaimed the joyful sense he had of a saving interest in the covenant, and his gladness in hailing the blissful moment of his departure to the purchased rest.

There is something extremely interesting in the spirit of sympathy expressed by this aged saint towards the younger believers who stood before him. In the midst of his views of the widely extended empire of Christ, and of the eternity into which his soul was ready to pass, he contemplated the more private concerns of individuals, to whom he knew a large portion of trouble was appointed, mingled in their cup of privilege. To Mary especially his affectionate sympathy was drawn forth ; he entered into the peculiar nature of that sorrow which she was reserved to experience, in the rejection and murder of the infant over whom her maternal heart was then yearning ; and whilst contemplating these approaching scenes, he tenderly commiserated her natural feelings, and dropped on her ear some warning words, by which he designed to put her upon preparation for the cross, and to direct her mind to spiritual exercises, and the regulation of her views and expectations. Thus Simeon spake as a prophet, counselled as a friend, and sympathised as a fellow creature and fellow

saint ; closing his long course of devoted service, in an exercise worthy the spirit and character of a believer and prophet of God !

We rejoice in the evidence thus continually breaking forth of that covenant in Christ, which secures, that a remnant shall be saved ; and once more we hail the Spirit's certain marks, delighting to see how he prepares and sanctifies the vessels of mercy. The sanctity of the Lord's favoured ones, the elevation of their course, their visible integrity, their acknowledged devotion, are all demonstrations of the power and of the truth of divine engagements ; and when we consider the wide-spread ruin, and the deep depravity and ignorance of miserable man, we must needs feel excited to wonder and adore, when, out of these ruins, the beautiful superstructure rises to our sight of souls modelled after the image of Christ himself. Never let us contemplate such memorials without some new impression of the divine glory. They are each and all leading demonstrations of the Saviour's triumph over the powers of darkness ; and if we love the Saviour, we must rejoice in his honour. How greatly, likewise, is the blessed Holy Ghost exalted in every example of this nature ! Were not he faithful to the offices which he has undertaken in the work of salvation, we could never behold one memorial so raised in the earth. Vain are all human efforts, impotent the most laboured endeavours, and inefficient the purest testimony of a crucified and risen Lord, independently of the Holy Ghost. The divine glory pours contempt upon the most gigantic attempts of intellect, energy, persuasion, when not anointed by the Spirit's power ; and reserves, to this divine operator, all the glory of effectually building up a soul to everlasting life. We have therefore to recognize his work in the saints, and

to know that their excellency, whether of gifts or of grace, is owing to the same privilege as was given to Simeon. *The Holy Ghost is upon them!* Neither is there any one heir of the promise, here or hereafter, that has not been thus distinguished, by the abiding and covenant indwelling of this Comforter. Here he also operates the same dispositions as those he imparted to Simeon. Dwelling in the elect as a sanctifier, by whose omnipotent grace justice and devotion are established in the affections, and a principle of conscientious action diffused throughout the inner man, conducting the soul into precious views of the promise, and unfolding the prophecy, that, from within the lovely exterior in which it lies enveloped, the blessed essential provision may be disclosed. He it is who thus renders the sacred testimony comprehensible and dear to the enlightened mind, and prepares it to receive the Lord's purpose with simplicity, and *as* infinite wisdom has ordained. The possession of such a sacred resident within the mind and heart is unspeakably precious. We see the evidence of what it ensures by the holiness and peace enjoyed by the possessor; but let us also remember, that we see herein the evidence of certain condemnation to all such as are destitute of the blessing. It is revealed *unto us*, that none of the Lord's people shall depart hence, until they have seen the Lord's Christ. There is none other name under heaven given amongst men whereby they must be saved, but only the name of Jesus; and consequently, they must be brought to the perception of this great salvation, ere they close their eyes on human scenes. And this perception must also be correspondently with what the scriptures describe of appropriating faith. The sinner cannot escape the wages of his sins without an interest in the surety; and no interest is possessed without taking Jesus in our arms, and blessing

God ! This interesting act, therefore, which we behold in Simeon, figures the act of faith in every regenerate individual. The salvation of Jehovah is seen in incarnate love—in the humiliation of him who made himself of no reputation—who came as a son born, a child given, and who gave himself as the sin-bearing sacrifice, and the justifying head of his people. This salvation is accepted in Jesus of Nazareth, and brought home to the bosom as its only *consolation*. There may be a period of comparative lowness in the experience of a true believer, wherein he does not feel able to lay hold upon the full extent of the substance of promises ; but, in every stage of true faith, Christ is the object of that faith—the Christ revealed in the scriptures ; and a believer has neither hope or expectation, but as he can build upon the revelation of the Lord's suretiship ; and the force of love will impel such an one to long and wait for the fulness of the consolation, especially in the prospect of the hour of death. At that eventful moment, no distant views will suffice, no unappropriated Christ will give consolation, nothing short of Jesus in the arms can enable the heart and lips to exclaim, " Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace ! " Jesus is given to be our peace ; but he is so, as the triumphant Lord, who extracted the sting from death, spoiled the grave of its prey, and robbed hell of its victims ; and in this character he must be ours, through that faith which is of the operation of God, uniting the soul to him. It is thus that we experience consolation under all circumstances. The evils of life, the sorrows of death, are alleviated by the Saviour's sanctifying, sustaining, saving grace : and if we possess these revelations, we may anticipate our last scenes, as not less peaceful and triumphant than those of Simeon. Without this no consolation will rest upon our dying bed.

When the mind is under solemn impressions from thoughts of death and eternity, the subjects which press the reception of Jesus are not unwelcome. Man is irresistibly awed by the recollection of these great scenes lying before him, so assuredly, as what he must at some time meet; and unless he dares to enter into the desperate refuge of infidelity, he is constrained to feel, that a more than usual consolation will be needed in that trial. But when these thoughts are dismissed, usually Jesus is dismissed with them, and the carnal reasonings of nature are heard with more prevailing energy than any which the cross can produce. Many are offended in Christ, fulfilling Simeon's declaration, and stumbling and falling over this rock of offence. His person, his requirements, are distasteful; and their hearts remain unreconciled to him. O how lamentable is this fact, how ruinous to the never-dying soul, and how instructive to us, to seek the eternal Spirit with persevering humility, and with longings to be led by him to see the salvation of God. If we have heretofore stumbled, if we have fallen, and committed the trespass of taking offence at a crucified redeemer, let us bewail our infatuation and folly, and, instead of remaining in such a condition of condemnation, seek to verify the testimony of Simeon, that Christ is set for the *rising again* of the soul. There is an abundance of pardon in him, by which our iniquity may be taken away, an equal abundance of strength, by which the prostrate may be lifted up; and although, to our confusion and shame, the evil unbelieving thoughts of our hearts have been awfully revealed, we still may look unto this great salvation, and live by him whom we have hitherto rejected or despised. Our faith should credit and act upon this revelation, and our integrity be found by uniting us with the family of the Lord; and making us the manifest friends of Jesus.

Let us be persuaded to this surrender of our hearts to the possession of Christ ; and yield to those strivings and teachings of the Holy Ghost, which are above all price, and which yield the only consolation.

PRAYER.

ETERNALLY gracious Lord and Saviour, behold us who now come into Thy presence, and from whom we would that Thou shouldst receive the offering of devoted love, and O Thou in infinite compassion, look on us in the great atonement, and then the tribute will find acceptance with Thee. Dearest and blessed Lord, pass by our multiplied offences, and bury them all in Thy cross and grave, and bring us into peace with Thee, that peace which passeth understanding. We look for these blessings as effects produced by the Holy Ghost, as the witness of Jesus. There are no consolations out of our Lord, and none in him that we can know, unless the Spirit will take of the things of Christ, and reveal them to us. Therefore, blessed Lord, we implore the gift of this heavenly teacher, and implore the guidance and grace of his covenant office in our behalf. We believe that we never can depart in peace, until we have seen the Lord's Christ : we feel that there is no comfort for a dying bed, and no safety in the dreadful eternity, but as we have a part in the great surety, the only salvation. O ! in those scenes impart the sense of victory in the living head, and bless us with appropriating faith, that we may triumph when we die, and enter the invisible world with joyful fulness in our Lord. But now, O Lord, in the house of our pilgrimage, we need the same privilege ; this sinful world, these sinful hearts, afford us nothing out of which

we can extract a real good ; and we are ever encompassed by vicissitudes, temptations, and griefs, from the evil of which no hand can succour us but Thine. Do not refuse us the blessed possession of the sure mercies of our David ; O shed forth into our hearts the consolations which have been so abundantly provided in the blood and righteousness of our soul's beloved : and amidst the many miseries which attend this mortal life, O let our pure joys be ever fresh and ever full in Jesus' love. Dearest Saviour, we desire now to embrace Thee in the arms of our faith, to bring Thee home to our hearts with an appropriating power, and to live in the peace which Thou hast bequeathed to those who follow Thee ! Thus distinguish our souls with the willing saints ; and living or dying, grant, blessed Lord, that we may be wholly Thine, to the praise and glory of Thy covenant love, Father, Son, and Spirit, our only God. Amen.

ZACCHEUS.

Luke xix. 1—10.

ZACCHEUS was by occupation a publican, and consequently living under the same stigma as we have seen in looking into Matthew's character, was invariably annexed to this calling in the Jewish nation. Hearing of Jesus as about to pass by the way where he might have an opportunity of seeing him, he resolved to make the attempt ; but being little of stature, and a multitude of people pressing around the steps of Jesus, he found this impossible, unless by attaining some elevated situation ; he therefore ran before him, and climbing up into a tree, placed himself in the road along which Jesus must pass. No sooner did our Lord reach the place than, looking up, he addressed him by name, and bid him come down from the tree, and prepare him a welcome under his roof, for he intended that day to abide at his house. This proposal met a ready acceptance. Zaccheus hastened down and joyfully received him. During the entertainment which he had prepared for the Lord and his followers, the powerful operation of the Spirit was felt in his heart ; his bosom was agitated by new and surprising affections, and, under their strong impulse, he arose and stood forth in the midst of the assembly, publicly declaring his conviction, and that from that time he was ready to make restitution of all which he had wrongfully taken from others, and to consecrate the half of his remaining goods to the service of the poor. Jesus admitted the genuine nature of this profession, declared that salvation had visited his house, and numbered him with the spiritual as well as natural descendants of Abraham,

and amongst those lost ones whom he came to seek and save.

We have no necessity to recapitulate those evils which belonged to the life of a publican, or to mention again those natural and circumstantial impediments to the reception of Jesus which frequently existed in this line of life; we may apply the whole of the reasoning which respected the case of Matthew to that of Zaccheus, and have at once the condition of this man before us. In the present instance, we have also the *acknowledged* abuse of power, of which the publicans in general stood chargeable; for it appears, that the sin of having unjustly extorted money by false accusation rested with peculiar weight upon the conscience of this sinner. There was probably as little preparation in his heart for the discipleship to Jesus, at the time of his ascending the tree, as there was in that of Matthew at the receipt of custom. He seems to have had no other idea, but that of gratifying curiosity. He had heard of the fame of Jesus, for this was raised abroad on every side; he had heard the various opinions entertained of his character and mission, for this was a subject of general discussion; but he had not yet *seen* this remarkable person; he felt a strong desire to be gratified by beholding him with his own eyes, and of drawing his own conclusions; but he evidently had no expectation of receiving particular notice from the Lord, and no desire of obtaining any particular benefit from this power; he was satisfied with his present state; he aspired not after spiritual possessions; and intended, no doubt, after having satisfied his passing curiosity, to return to his usual avocations. There was, however, a fervency of disposition manifested in the demonstration of this desire; for he *ran*, he *climbed*, and was bent upon obtaining his object, notwithstanding obstructions; and no doubt, though

wholly unconscious of the influence he was under, the mighty operation of the Holy Ghost awakening him to this desire and impelling him forward. He was in fact a chosen vessel. One of those whom the Father had given to the Son, and for whom the covenant of life was provided. The narrative decidedly evinces this, both from the express words of Jesus, and from the particulars of Zaccheus' gradual but rapid advancement from a state of total ignorance to one of spiritual discernment; of moral depravity, to that of justice and integrity. The call which our Lord addressed to him, was, as to one well known, and as to a heart that was certain to obey. Well did Jesus know the character, intentions, and reserved discipleship of this miserable wanderer; and as he had first directed his purposes of love towards him, so it was a necessary consequence, that love, obedience, and gratitude, should spring up in this hitherto destitute soul. The influence upon Zaccheus was very powerful when first the call was heard; he *madé haste*, and came down, and received him *joyfully*. The unexpected salutation, the condescending overture, the prospect of having such a guest under his roof, filled him with joyous sensations, probably little understood by himself, but decidedly produced through the effectual grace first reaching him from the Lord. The further manifestation of a work of grace is very striking. We may suppose him listening with eagerness to every word which fell from the lips of Jesus. Most probably the Lord in his infinite wisdom would choose such subjects of discourse as were best suited to affect his conscience. It was necessary to convince him that his present course was one of ruin, that his sins were a condemning load upon his soul, and that the righteous requirement of Jehovah would not admit of the practices he followed. The arrow of conviction missed not its mark; it pierced the soul

of the listening sinner, and filled him with an unfeigned sense of personal transgressions. The anguish produced by this new and amazing sense was not resisted or concealed. With ingenuous and honest abasement, he desired to make an open confession of his vileness, and of the entire change effected in his views and sentiments, since he heard the words of Jesus. And as he had been a known transgressor, so he would now be known as a sincere penitent; in token of which before his fellow-men he acknowledged his sin, and at once proffered restitution to man to the utmost of his ability. Neither did he merely calculate upon what might be required of him as an act of justice, mercy now found a place within his breast, and the necessities of the poor were embraced with charity and generous sympathy. Thus the kingdom of Satan received its overthrow in his bosom; the power of divine grace established another reign; former passions were dislodged; and instead of covetousness, earthliness, and ignorance, he now felt and acknowledged the sanctifying efficacy of the indwelling Spirit, by whom he was henceforth a consecrated vessel unto honour.

These examples are highly honourable to the glorious perfections of Jehovah, for they at once proclaim his sovereignty and invincible force; when the purpose of love will arrest or recover a soul. This doctrine is what must always suggest comfort to such as know what human nature is; and whether this discovery is made in ourselves, or in the case of those for whose salvation we are solicitous; we may derive encouragement in looking for the complete redemption—a redemption which is fully adequate to take from the hands of Satan his most decided prey. God is glorified by the riches of his grace, and by the irresistible power of his will; and every instance, wherein this may

be pleaded, should be taken up by faith ; and the hope of success in Jehovah's power be instrumental to make us labour for the impartation of spiritual blessings to the otherwise destitute soul. It is very interesting to trace the leadings of our covenant God in those instances, which show forth the application of his saving purpose. Many are the examples of a guidance and inward impulse in the heart, which has proceeded from God upon an unconscious sinner, who, thus led, is brought into situations where the effectual blessing meets him. Sometimes, like Zaccheus, mere curiosity will induce persons to attend places where they expect to see or hear something which has attracted the public attention, and of which they have the desire of becoming judges by ocular demonstration. They find an unexpected opportunity probably of gratifying this curiosity, and will be at some pains to obtain by a present exertion the object of their wishes, by no means intending to become regular hearers, or to be numbered with such as are professed Christian pilgrims. In this disposition there may sometimes be nothing more than vain or empty inquiry ; but very frequently the effect which follows demonstrates, that there has been more than mere human contrivance in this pursuit. The occasion proves more personal in its application than was expected ; a revelation of Jesus is given at this time which was unexpected, but which is by no means distasteful ; the subject carries with it an importance which seems to involve *personal* interests ; and even when sitting in some distant place, supposing himself to be unknown and unobserved, it will appear as if the Saviour so passed by, as to leave a token of having had special observation of him. It is as if the word addressed him individually, pronounced his own name ; and that with such an air of condescending grace displayed in the Saviour, as to give a hope

that under such a roof, within a heart so vile, Jesus might deign to dwell. Impressions of this description are followed by a closer application of the testimony; and whilst the subject, which is now become interesting to the heart, engages some serious reflections, the Spirit will effect *conviction*. The habits, practice, and principles hitherto vindicated and indulged, being contrasted with those of disciples, and the life compared with the divine requirement, it becomes evident that there is not only a difference, but that this difference has in it *sin*, and needs repentance. Serious thoughts ensue, but not despondency; for as the soul is now upright with God, it not only believes in the possibility of being pardoned, but is ready to act ingenuously with the Lord. This state of mind will lead us to the fulfilment of the whole of the example before us; restitution, charity, humility, and open discipleship, will follow.

When contemplating God's work as thus unfolded, we have an important part to discharge in our own souls. These are truths which should be brought home, and we have now to investigate the nature of our own conversion; for if it be indeed effected, fruits of this description will appear in us. The first affections awakened in a convert, are not always alike. Some are led by joy, others by fear. Some are long kept under apprehensions, others quickly pass into liberty. But in all the fruits of sanctification, believers will participate, and consequently will bear in their own character, the marks discernible in Zaccheus. The conviction of sin will not only be general, but particular; offences will be recalled with all their aggravation; the state of nature will be lamented with humiliation; the developement of it with self-aborrence, and in this spirit the convert will sometimes sit, ruminating on the past, whilst memory is now awakened to perform an affecting part, bringing

to remembrance the various deeds by which rebellion, and a breach of God's law is charged upon the soul. Whilst these thoughts are busily passing in the mind, earnest desires to remedy the evil, so far as fellow-sinners are concerned, will arise in the heart. Restitution to the Lord can never be made; this must be let alone for ever; the infinite surety being the only one able to restore that which we have taken away of the service we owed to God. But there are ways whereby it may be possible, in some respects, to make amends to those whom we may have injured. Be it in property, in character, in peace, we may be humbly confessing our sin, and giving back what we have by false accusation or oppression taken away, we may greatly repair the breaches we have committed against a brother; and an ingenuous soul, under the operation of the Holy Ghost, will not rest until he has endeavoured thus to manifest his repentance and change of character. The genuine effect of grace will also be evidenced by the *immediate* act. The operation does not accord with those *delays*, and that spirit of procrastination which belongs to man as a creature full of insincerity, but, being the pure and holy dictate of the indwelling Spirit, prompts to the instant observance of what is now understood to be required by the divine precept, and puts the soul upon the cheerful effort of compliance with what the conscience has suggested. Along with these exercises, the spirit will be embued with brotherly-kindness and practical charity, so that whatever may be possessed of worldly goods, there will be a ready consecration of a large proportion to those interests, which are now the subjects of sympathy in the renewed heart. Let us try ourselves by such a standard, and compare this simple history of the Lord's dealings with what has been experienced by ourselves, endeavouring to grow in the persuasion of

our judgment, that a *new creation* is absolutely requisite to a state of salvation, and restlessly pressing our souls to the cultivation of the fruits that are evidential of this work. Assuredly we shall have these ardent desires, if we know the Lord ; for what is more inseparable from love, than a desire to exalt the object beloved ? and by what means can we so effectually exalt our dear Redeemer, as by demonstrating in our spirit and practice, his victory over the powers of darkness, his power to liberate those who are ransomed by his blood ? It is the glorious distinction of Jesus' people, that they are *free* : and it is their privilege in the covenant, to walk in the liberty of children, and to shake off the fetters of their former slavery. To this let us each aspire, and bless our great Redeemer, that there is in his voice an invincible might, which can reach to the inner man, and can speak deliverance and assure of peace.

PRAYER.

ETERNALLY blessed and gracious Lord, we adore Thee as the Sovereign Lord of all, and we invoke Thee as the covenant head of Thy saints ; we beseech Thee answer our cry, and enter our hearts with power. Behold us in the beloved, that we may be drawn to Thee by the grace which is secured in Him ; and, notwithstanding our own utter unworthiness, extend the favour without which we perish. O blessed Lord, we are as wandering sinners, estranged from the paths of life and peace, and full of misery, deserving thy wrathful indignation rather than Thy love ; and we meekly confess that there is no ground of hope for us, but in the compassion which flows through Christ. Most graciously receive our confessions, most powerfully bring us into Thy fold. We desire to be

under that operation of grace, which arrests the thoughtless mind, which applies the word of conviction, which opens the heart to the eternal salvation, which satisfies the soul in Thee ; O fulfil this Thy own act of love, blessed Redeemer, in our behalf, and make us to experience what has liberated other souls. Pardon those unworthy thoughts which we in our ignorance entertained of Thee ; forgive us the corrupt motives, which in too many instances first led our feet into the regions where Thy power is known ; and shew forth the riches of salvation, by making us Thy manifest disciples. We would honestly and uprightly proffer Thee the fruit of Thy own victory, by consecrating our all to Thy service ; and would be prompt and impartial in embracing every occasion wherein we may demonstrate our conversion by deeds of justice, charity, and love. O shew us wherein we have transgressed against Thy laws ; shew us in what instances we have done wrong to man ; and fill our breasts with holy purposes to restore fourfold, what we have done of oppression or of evil, in deeds of mercy and truth. To Thee, O God, we have no power of making restitution ; our iniquities exceed all calculation, and we are not able to answer for one of the least of our transgressions ; but we cast our care upon Jesus, we appeal to him as our surety, we lay hold upon his sufferings and righteousness ; O let these avail in our behalf, for he has magnified the law, and made it honourable. With our whole soul resting in this salvation, we commit our all to Thee, Father, Son, and Spirit, our one blessed God. Amen.

THE POOR WIDOW.

Luke xxi. 1—4. Mark xi. 41—44.

DEGENERATE as was the nation of Israel at the period of Christ's advent, we find that all external and ceremonial duties were scrupulously enforced, and that, what the Jews failed to cultivate in the temple of the heart, they were solicitous to ensure in the building of stones wherein they prided themselves. Here they sought to maintain decorations, ornaments, and sacrifices; and even such men as were flagitious, and lived in the perpetual breach of moral rectitude, were found zealously contending for the support of services and forms of worship, by which they hoped to substitute what would render them acceptable to God, notwithstanding their disobedience to his laws. The treasury was a place in the temple set apart for the reception of offerings presented by the worshippers who assembled there. There were voluntary subscriptions towards defraying the expenses of the temple, providing wood for the fire of the sacrifices and other requisites in the Jewish ceremony. Occasions were taken from this appointment, for an ostentatious display of seeming liberality and zeal; many giving abundantly, but from corrupt motives. Others no doubt would contribute with more humble and spiritual affections. But as the judgment of man was warped and depraved, too often the gift was appreciated according to its *quantity* without inquiring into the quality; and thus many evils were fostered and encouraged amongst the Jews, in this one instance of their degeneracy which our Lord condemned and exposed. Upon one of the occasions

of public worship, Jesus placed himself near to the treasury; and he saw many rich men casting in of their abundance, and in the midst of them a certain poor widow, who dropt but a small tribute, for it was only "two mites." But the disposition of the heart of this donor was precious and valuable; and Jesus, knowing the secret motives by which each had been actuated, immediately seized the opportunity for imparting spiritual instruction. Calling his disciples unto him, he said, "Of a truth, I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all." What effect this testimony had upon the disciples, we know not; but to us it affords the most instructive lesson.

We must, in the first place, prolong our observation of the poor widow. Her condition as to this world is positively affirmed. She was extremely poor; *two mites* formed the whole of her portion of this world's treasures. Jesus uses terms descriptive of a state of great necessity; her *penury*, *all* she had, *all* her living; and describes her as a widow, and so not only destitute of human resources, but deprived of the comfort of her former protector, who might have afforded her help or alleviation under her necessities. We cannot conceive of outward circumstances more reduced and dependent than these. In the midst of this desolation she was however truly rich; for her soul was a treasury wherein the blessed and imperishable possessions of the covenant were freely and fully lodged. It is very evident that the ordinances of the Lord were her delight and her refuge. Here she solaced her soul, and found in the great things proclaimed and typified beneath the temple roof, such a portion as soothed every present grief, taught her to encounter privations, and made her experimentally to know how man does not live by bread only, but by every word

that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. We gather this impression of her character, both from the Lord's witness in her favour, and from her own conduct. Had she not experienced some peculiar and substantial support from these ordinances, she would scarcely have frequented them with that zealous affection which made her not only love to enter the courts of the Lord, but free to contribute what she could to the support of the services. Small as her ability was, she assembled with the rest, not as a pauper or beggar to be relieved by the charity of others, but as a spiritual daughter of Zion to *give* the sacrifice by which Zion's privileges might be maintained. Too well she knew the worth of these ordinances, not to desire that they should long remain an honour and ornament to Judah's race; and little as she had wherewith to promote such great works, *all that* she had was freely given. In this spirit she evinced fervent practical zeal and charity. But there was more than this. Many were the sources whence, had she not been vigorous in faith, her soul would have been troubled and obstructed by carnal reasonings. Human nature was then what it is now, and she had reason to suppose that from men she might receive a hard judgment, were it known that she had contributed *any* thing; much more if it were known that she gave *all* she possessed. She was visibly poor and destitute; men might therefore say, What right had she to give? or they might argue, If this woman has so much to spare, it is manifest she is not an object demanding our commiseration or care. Nature, in her own heart, might likewise be ready with discouraging arguments; the absolute beggary she was in, the certainty of having personal necessities to relieve, the smallness of the gift, which she might have reasoned could not contribute any real advantage to the temple,—these were all grounds upon

which she might have felt justified to herself, in passing the treasury without attention. All these, however were subject to the one simple principle of *faith*, while grace triumphed over all conclusions suggested by nature, raised her above the opinions of men, above the fears of want, above the thought of personal results ! Let us not say there was *imprudence* in the act. It seems that although it was all her living, it was her *own*. Had she defrauded any, or were the two mites due in justice to other claimants,—our Lord would not have approved her. It seems that the option lay between the allotment of this portion to the temple or to her own support: she preferred the first method of disposing the possession; and she possibly might enter the temple fasting, thus making the sacrifice of her own appetite for the gratification of higher feelings. She was able to take the *promise* for her heritage. This abounds with all which can be required for body or soul. She had learnt to appropriate it as her own; and through the dark clouds of present want, she could penetrate into the love and faithfulness of her God, who stood engaged that her bread should be sure and her waters never fail. Thus she manifested the strength of that divine principle, which received a gracious acknowledgment from the Lord. It was confessed by him as an acceptable fruit of the Spirit, and as rising up before the eternal throne with more fragrant and precious odour than all the apparently costly tributes of the rich and great. She was happy in the midst of poverty, rich notwithstanding her state of want, spiritual and content although treading along a pathway wherein care and solicitude were ready to meet her; and she forms one of those lovely examples of the life of a true believer, on which we ought to dwell with affectionate sympathy towards her, and gratitude for the instruction thus conveyed to ourselves.

The first great point of edification, which is afforded us in this example, arises from the evident discrimination with which the Lord judges of actions—and in which he instructs us likewise so to judge. We have always a necessity to watch over our own minds upon this subject, because we are readily dazzled by the exterior show, display, or pomp, which strikes upon the senses; and under delusive feelings we pronounce that to be good, which upon examination has nothing intrinsic in it; whilst we despise or pass by the more valuable objects, because they wear not so bold or obtrusive an aspect. The multiplied gifts of rich and great men, to those objects of charity, or to religious institutions, which engage their attention, will be registered in *our* minds as vast deeds of generosity, zeal, and love. The punctual attendance of worshippers on the ordinances of God's house, wherein a vast quantity of religious acts are accumulated, will secure in the opinion of the world a character for extraordinary love of God's service, and delight in devotion. The ardent and excited passions of the warmhearted, leading into the display of sensibility, or of exalted frames in religious exercises, will obtain for any man the report of being full of true feeling, and highly favoured of God. But do we not immediately perceive upon close investigation, that these are not the evidences which form a criterion, which the Christian's judgment must be governed by? We trust that in many instances they are attended with genuine motives, and rise from a pure spring; but we know that it may be otherwise; for that all, which has been described, has existed in characters, wherein selfishness, vanity, self-complacency, and self-delusion have prevailed. We do not condemn the richer tribute; but we suggest the necessity of looking to the motives which actuate the offerer. Neither can we in all cases exculpate the poor from

the very spirit which endangers the rich—for *two mites* may be given with as much ostentation, self-righteousness, and sin, as the many thousands. All which this lesson presents is a check upon the propensity of our hearts to judge by a false standard, and an excitement to appreciate *holy motives*, especially such as move a soul from simple faith in the Lord, to sacrifice to him of that which costs us much, or which calls for self-denial.

Having rectified our judgment upon these points, we should proceed to exercise it in respect of our own particular character, and circumstances. If we have of *the abundance* of this world's goods, or are rich in mental powers, or have extensive possession in influence from our station or relative connections;—we have to inquire, how we use these possessions? and if we answer,—‘for the sanctuary of God,’—with what motives and principles we are donors in this sense? It is well to give of our treasure, and to drop it into God's treasury; but it is better, if we add to this a simple motive of love and devotion to the interests which we are thus promoting. Thousands perish, who have largely contributed to the means by which others are saved; and the heart-searching Jehovah will not accept tributes, which have nothing in them of the spirit of his children. How important, therefore, is it, that we proffer with all these sacrifices, the sacrifice of our *heart*, in the great offering Jesus Christ our Lord. If we are *poor*, having but a scanty proportion of what is to sustain our mortal life, yet it is our duty to give diligence gladly to give of that little. The smallest *quantity* of earthly treasure, of mental talent, or of influence must yield its tithe to the Lord; otherwise, there resteth upon us, and all we have, a blasting and canker, that shall destroy all of which we now hold possession. And if we have faith, we shall not need to be urged upon this point, since this is an

active grace which is always devising liberal things. So far from being a robber of the treasury, the thoughts will meditate upon the best and most likely method, by which worldly affairs may be arranged so as to leave a greater proportion to the Lord. And if so little is possessed, as to give scarcely a prospect of contributing more than the humble wish, the sigh, or prayer; yet sooner than not express the union of the heart with interests of this description, self will be denied, even of some of those things which otherwise might have appeared *necessaries*. Is this our mode of judging and acting? Is there an all observant eye of discrimination upon us, to which we can humbly appeal, that with these sentiments we wait upon the Lord, being ready in his strength to forego personal gratifications for his sake, or to rest our prospects upon him to dispose of us as he shall providentially appoint? Let us be careful whilst engaged in this course not to admit what may tarnish the lustre of the christian simplicity, or depress our own spirit. Temptation may perhaps assail us, false shame may induce us to feel a certain awkwardness and diffidence in giving what men may perhaps despise, and discouragement may enter into our heart through our poverty; we must therefore guard this avenue, keeping our eye simply on the Lord who seeth the heart, and not being ashamed that we have no more to give. Our God has richly endowed us if he has made us heirs of the promises. These will distinguish us in time and eternity; and if so privileged, our tribute should be one of praise even from the depth of poverty. If Jesus be the treasure of our heart, he will always impart a satisfying measure of grace, alleviating all our sorrows, making us content with present appointments, giving us a holy sense of privilege if we may proffer our smallest offering, and causing us to drop our sigh, our prayer, our word of sym-

pathy or counsel, into his treasury, with assurance that he will not despise the gift that flows from entireness of heart to him. In this walk of faith and love, the believer will experience the increasing enjoyments which flow out of expressions of divine favour, conveyed to the soul by the Holy Ghost. Never did any poor sinner thus follow after Christ without finding him true to every promise. And saints may echo back the exulting strain of the apostle, in every age declaring, that though having nothing they possess all things.

P R A Y E R.

ALMIGHTY God, elevate the affections of our hearts, we humbly beseech Thee, to Thy own blessed Self, in whom we would find our lasting and all-sufficient portion; and help us we pray Thee to realize, and appropriate, all that Thou art to Thy people. Arise, O Lord God, upon our hearts, and send forth the beams of Thy countenance, and grant that by the fire of Thy divine love our corruptions may be consumed, and our souls be sanctified. Take away from us, O God, the selfishness and love of present good, which obstructs the exercise of simple faith; and O let there be room in our hearts for the growth of every divine affection implanted by Thy grace. Thy children are taught, and enabled to set their affections on things above, and to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; these blessed souls are favoured by possessions, which enrich and satisfy them, even in poverty, want, and shame; O give us an interest in these privileges, make us Thy children, and bless us with desires all centered in Thee. We pray Thee, that if we possess abundance in this world, we may be enabled to give a cheerful contribution to Thy

glory, in the sanctuary, and to the necessities of the poor and needy. Or if we are poor, Lord, make us rich in such faith as will sacrifice all things before Thee, offering up our all to Thy service, and confiding in Thee for the preservation of our life, and of all that is needful for us here. We trust Thee to accept not only the little which we may be able to contribute to Thy services of wealth, but to receive also what we may be able to demonstrate of zeal for Thy saints, in sympathy, in counsel, in prayer. O Jesus, take our “cup of cold water,” take our “two mites,” small as is the proportion compared to the labours or gifts of others, despise not the fruit of faith, the sacrifice of Thy disciples ! We are thine—all we have is thine—prove that Thou thus esteemest us, gracious Saviour ; and O let us receive tokens of love and peace. We implore Thee thus to bless and accept us in Thyself our only Lord and life. Amen.

THE DYING THIEF.

Luke xxiii. 32—43.

OUR thoughts are carried once more to those affecting scenes, where our blessed Lord offered himself in sacrifice for man, and we contemplate in the character on which we now enter, a wonderful and glorious example of his victory in this work of love. Two malefactors were crucified with Christ, to one of whom our attention is particularly attracted. They were each under sentence of condemnation for crimes committed against the law, and had received their sentence according to the nature of their offence. The circumstances under which they suffered were peculiar. And as it was the design of the Jews to cast all the ignominy in their power upon the person of our Lord, we may reasonably conclude that they were considered criminals of the worst description. The influence upon their minds when in the last hour, was altogether different. In one case we see the hardness of awful impenitence ; in the other, the most extensive affections of a true penitent, suddenly convinced of his own awful condition, and struck with abhorrence of the spirit evinced by his companion. He first addressed him with a severe rebuke of his blasphemy, appealing to him on the ground of those perilous circumstances in which his soul was placed, and of the reason he had for fear. In this rebuke he acknowledged the justice with which the law had dispensed judgment on them both, and professed his sense of the innocence of their Lord who hung on the tree, and whom the desperate malefactor had blasphemed. And then, turning to Jesus, he presented his

fervent supplications, entreating that when he entered into his kingdom, he would remember his soul. To this request Jesus graciously replied, assuring him, that ere that day closed upon the world, he should be with him in paradise.

We are not left to draw our conclusion respecting the penitent Thief, from any merely circumstantial evidences ; the Holy Spirit has given the record, in terms which decidedly rank him amongst the redeemed heirs of glory. Neither can we hesitate as to the character and course of this man, previously to the awful period when he addressed his cry to the Lord. He was by his own confession a malefactor, and suffering justly as the result of his own guilt. He was condemned as a thief, so that he was a transgressor of the divine law, and had also exposed himself to the judgment of the civil magistrate, apparently without regard to the requirements of God or man, and without fear of divine or human power. We necessarily conclude that he was a sinner, indulging in depraved principles, habits, and associations. By these he was at length reduced to the wretched condition of becoming a public monument of justice, exhibiting to his fellow creatures the miserable spectacle of human depravity and infatuation, and enduring in his own body the infliction of those dreadful pains, which the sympathetic heart shudders to contemplate, and which had he not been a monument of redeeming grace, were but the prelude to tortures of a more tremendous kind. When we consider the character of this man, the sudden and unexpected change wrought in his soul, must appear the more surprising. Terrible as were the sufferings of his dying hour, he seems to have lost the sense of these, in comparison with the view he now had of his true circumstances as a sinner. His former companion

in guilt did indeed evince a power of rising above the bitterness of death, so far as to enter into thoughts and passions full of the interests foreign to his own ; but this was evidently done in the desperation of abandoned hardihood, or perhaps he might imagine, that by taking so decisive a part with the blasphemous rulers and multitude, he might be released as an act of favour to him, on account of his zeal in their cause. Very different was the disposition with which the penitent beheld himself and the Saviour : and that victory which he obtained over the sense of present torture, was manifestly owing to the stronger interest in the Lord, which now graciously absorbed his soul. The conviction of this man's soul had all the marks of genuine repentance : he was filled with a deep sense of the extent of his iniquity, he did not hesitate in making an ingenuous acknowledgment of his sin, he fully justified the apparent severity of the law, and humbly accepted the condemnation with an acquiescing self-abased mind. Thus personal humiliation was secured in his breast by the power of divine grace, and he lay prostrate by a sentence passed at the bar of his own conscience, and much more condemning than any which his fellow men could pronounce.

In connexion with this sense of personal vileness, we hear him making confession of the glory of Christ, which was now revealed to his understanding in peculiar force. He beheld him expiring under a judgment which in his case was iniquitous and unjust ; he believed him to be innocent, and to be dying as a sacrifice by the malice and treachery of men : knowing as he did that Jesus died in consequence of Israel's rejection of his claims to be the Messiah, an avowal of him as innocent, was in fact a confession of him as justified in his pretensions, and as the blessed Christ. And whilst thus acknowledging his claim,

he likewise displayed how far he was taught by the Spirit, for he recognized a *kingdom* as belonging to this glorious Lord, and bowed himself in faith before him as King, and Lord, and Sovereign ; as having a right of disposal in his kingdom, and a power of extending even in the invisible world safety and honour to his subjects. This was a degree of faith, and a purity and discernment of faith, singularly excellent in its character. In order to discover its wonderful energy, we should remember the particular occasion on which it was expressed : even at the very time when the external condition of the Lord was most abased ; when the enemy seemed to have prevailed ; when dark clouds gathered round the surety's head ; and when *nature* would have judged him to be a miserable captive rather than a triumphant prince. Through all these mists of darkness, the faith of the penitent was enabled to penetrate, and steadfastly to apprehend the majesty and grace of the Redeemer. That he apprehended his *grace*, is affectingly demonstrated by the humble appeal which he made in behalf of his own wretched soul. He could believe that even unto him in this last hour, mercy might be shewn ; he was persuaded the kingdom was Christ's to bestow ; he knew that the Lord rejected not the miserable ; he understood how the handwriting against him would be taken away, and that the treasures laid up in Messiah's purpose of love were not beyond his reach ; for these he now felt his bosom glow with new and fervent desires ; and by an energetic act of faith and love, he at once threw himself upon the covenant mercy, turning his inward emotion into audible prayers, and supplicating for a share in the spiritual inheritance of the Lord's children.

A further important mark of his conversion is discoverable in that lively zeal for the honour of Christ which animated him to address the blas-

phemer. Herein he demonstrated that holy indignation which is inseparable from genuine hatred of sin ; he abhorred it in himself, he condemned it in a brother ; and with courageous affection to him whom he now confessed as Lord, he openly rebuked the railer. It was in the power of the bystanders, to have added more torture and insult in consequence of this avowal of Christ ; but this he feared not, he was content to be in the condemnation with Christ as one rejected of men, and ready to share in the ignominy and shame of the cross. These were evidences that his penitence was not the mere selfish dread of suffering, or of future destruction, but that there was kindled in his soul, that fire which owes its existence to the indwelling operation of the Holy Ghost, by whom alone it is that we are effectually convinced of sin, abased for it, justify the sentence against us, confess our guilt, believe in Jesus, discern his person and offices, cry to him for life, reprove transgression, have a zeal for Christ's glory and a godly fear. All this the penitent thief abundantly experienced, and is justly considered one of the greatest monuments of divine power and grace,

In the example which we here contemplate, the glory of Emmanuel is conspicuous ; the prophetic witness of his triumphs over death and hell is avouched to be true ; and he is seen even in the depths of humiliation, dividing the prey with the mighty, and taking a spoil from the strong. Here on the cross, while numbered with transgressors, his power to redeem and strength to save, is made manifest, and Satan receives the token of that blow which was struck at the foundation of his empire, when Jesus encountered the curse. The soul of this dying thief was reserved to decorate the crown which the Saviour was to display as eternally his in the triumphs of his mediatorial work ; and as his resurrection was to be graced by

attendant bodies, raised from the regions of the dead, so his dying moments were to be owned by a first fruits exhibited to spectators, of the effect of the travail of his soul, in rescuing the sinner from the power of guilt. In this respect the record of the salvation of the dying thief, is exceedingly important and interesting; and believers will delight in contemplating the scene as giving glory to Messiah, their Prince and Lord. But there is an increase of holy enjoyment experienced by such souls, when they humbly compare the state of their own souls with that of the sinner thus rescued. No person who is acquainted with their own depravity, or with the spirituality of God's law, will refuse to make this comparison. However a man may be preserved from the commission of gross crimes, such as reduce him to the sentence of a judicial court, none can plead exemption from the accusation reserved against the day when God shall judge the secrets of men; and even in that particular sin for which this criminal was condemned by the laws of his country, men in general will be found guilty. Thieving is a native propensity of the evil heart, manifested in childhood, and arising out of covetousness, appetite, ambition, and various other passions, which for gratification will put the mind upon devising how to obtain, and the hand upon seeking how to secure the object that is to afford pleasure. We must also take into consideration all those different species of the same propensity, so widely displayed as the natural growth of the sinner's heart, shewing that very little scruple is felt in committing a robbery upon God or man, in things religious or of a moral character. And although there are various counteracting principles which prevent the full developement of this propensity in men, as they mature in life, or feel they have a character to sustain, perhaps every one will confess, when

taking a retrospect of their days from childhood, that evidences of the existence of this sin may be discovered in them. Therefore to *grace* we owe the difference between our own moral character in this respect, and that of the vilest thief who dies by the public executioner ; our own nature if let alone, being capable of perpetrating the foulest and most disgraceful deed. Whilst gratitude rises in our heart for this mercy, is there not room also for *fear* ? May it not be said when looking to him who is a heart-searching judge, and who remembers all the past, that we have each reason to admit serious meditation, and to turn in our thoughts the interesting question, of how we shall escape condemnation, for the nature we have, and the acts that are past ? Assuredly we shall answer in the affirmative if we are humbled, and thus be brought to occupy the very place of the penitent thief, as a beggar for covenant salvation, an importuning soul for the loving remembrance of Jesus. This frame of mind will enable us to behold the resplendent, but mild glory of a crucified Lord, with an admiration and love most peculiar. His *innocency* will become a subject of meditation most precious. Considering him as the only mediator, the Christ of God, it becomes the joyful boast of the believer, that he was a lamb without spot, able therefore to offer as an atonement for man's sin, a pure and acceptable sacrifice, a sweet savour to God. Faith brings the admiring eye to rest on this mysterious provision, and by the same grace, the hand is laid upon the head of the guiltless victim, and the burden of the individual's guilt rolled upon the substitute. A full persuasion of the infinitely holy offering which was made upon the cross, will give animation to the appeals which are made for individual mercy. Contrasted with this, the enormous quantity of sin, which dismays, confounds, and must condemn the soul

that stands naked before the judge, is not considered as sufficient to doom the sinner to helpless despair. The *remedy* is *infinite*, the application of it is *free*, and the convinced soul is made able to put forth the expression of this faith in simplicity. Such an one has nothing to propose of exculpation for his crimes, he confesses that punishment is due : he has nothing to propose as a bribe for mercy, he feels he is utterly bankrupt, and destitute of all spiritual or moral worth or power ; he has nothing to say but “ Lord, remember me.” In this spirit he supplicates for all the varied blessings of redemption, pardon, acceptance, consolation, strength, whatever be the gifts distributed in the Saviour’s kingdom here or hereafter, are asked as boons bestowed out of the fulness of sovereign love ; and well does this little sentence fit in with the necessities and circumstances of every day and every hour, each and all of which may properly send up the humble suit, “ Lord, remember me.” It is in fact the pleading of the promise made to Abraham, and entailed on all the spiritual seed of Abraham, when Jehovah said “ Blessing, I will bless *thee*.” This is the life of faith into which we pass, when by confession we are brought to the knowledge of ourselves, and of Christ, and it is a heritage by which life is sweetened, so that they are to be pronounced happy who possess it, as a cheering companion to days and years of pilgrimage.

It is however demonstrated, by the example of the dying thief, that even the death-hour may be blest to the impartation of these unsearchable mercies ; and that they who have lived in awful transgression, even to the remotest period of their mortal career, may be the subjects on whom the recovering power is exercised. The long-suffering of God is abused, and this example of the dying thief is not unfrequently turned into an occasion of stumbling, by those who are resolved upon

venturing their salvation to a death-bed repentance ; but this must not induce us to cloud the lustre of the divine grace, or to throw a veil upon the thief, and the triumphs of Jesus in him ; neither to withhold from sinners that this is a gospel truth : they *can* be saved, even at the instant of death—Jehovah's power and Jesus' worth being without limit. But let us judge righteous judgment : this example is a *very singular* one as to *circumstances* ; so that no sinner since that period can be again placed in any that are like them. It is also *very eminent* as to the nature of the *fruits* visibly seen in the soul ; so that the divine and supernatural work was *unquestionable*. If, therefore, we claim a correspondence of experience in the privileges of this man, we must be equally zealous to evince the condition, observing *well* the genuine marks of that penitence which is described in the scriptures as the Spirit's work ; at the same time remembering, that he who can reason upon this example, for the purpose of justifying procrastination, or a course of rebellion, affords at present a very little promise of being possessed of the ingenuous spirit displayed by the thief. Not that this is impossible, for the disposition is a gift ; but there is no *present* warrant for any thing but doubt and distrust respecting such a character. When we receive the testimony uprightly, it tends to stimulate against sin, and to holiness. And thus let us endeavour to use the consolatory record.

In the concerns of our own soul, let us take the blessed provision which is proffered in Jesus' ample love, and come with all our guilt, and lay hold upon him as a surety for our souls, doubting nothing. He is able, he is willing, to remove the grievous load, and to love us freely. In our dying hour let this especially be the expression of our

faith, and "Lord, remember me," be breathed from our lips, even when they are ready to be cold in death. Let the appeal embrace in it *Jesus* in all his wondrous offices, and be the confession of his victory over the last enemy. And when we are called to visit those who are encountering the natural foe, let us use the history of the dying thief as instructive to us in the course we should take. The gospel may be freely and fully proposed, even to the vilest sinner, at the latest hour; but we must carefully look for the genuine evidences of a real faith in him, before we allow its consolations to be seized; lest it should be the instrument used by Satan to produce a fatal security. In visiting prisons, or in attending condemned malefactors, they who are called to this office may also derive encouragement from this example. And no subject could more suitably apply to the condition of such miserable persons, as it affords an affecting testimony of the consequences of sin, combined with a directive voice which points to Jesus as the only refuge, and shews the nature of the Spirit's work in hearts that are contrite through his grace. Thus we may dwell on the present record with great interest and improvement, magnifying the salvation that is in Jesus our Lord.

PRAYER.

O ALMIGHTY and ever blessed Lord, we humbly beseech Thee to look on us as Thy creatures, reserved for that inheritance which is purchased by the blood and righteousness of the great Surety. And that we may receive from Thee those blessed operations of grace which apply the salvation of Christ to the needy soul, impress us all with a just sense of the extent of our responsibility, and of the

greatness of our guilt, that we may not be seeking assurance of peace in any false refuge, but may understand that we have no hope unless the Lord Jesus be our refuge and strong Deliverer. We bless Thee, Lord, if we have been preserved from the many scandalous crimes which our fellow-sinners may have committed : but we would remember that our nature is the same ; and that there is no difference in our practice but what has been secured by restraining mercies from Thee. O teach us, when contemplating the unhappy criminal brought by his crimes to public infamy and death, to exercise a spirit of compassion to him, whilst we abhor his sins ; and to bear in our minds the lively recollection of our own exposure to the more dreadful judgment of Christ, for offences committed against the divine command. In this spirit may we ever be humbled, and may dependence upon Thee be the habitual frame of our mind ; so that in our whole pilgrimage through life we may be kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation, and may rest in the everlasting arms for every measure of strength or comfort that we possess. Open our understanding to know the great redemption as it is provided and revealed ; and O open our affections also to receive the Lord our Saviour into every feeling and desire of the soul ; and may we, in unfeigned love and faith, be able, both living and dying to say in true affiance, “ Lord, remember me ! ” O do Thou so remember us, blessed Lord, as Thou dost all that are graven upon the palms of Thy hands. Do Thou think upon us as Thou dost on those whose every care is lodged in Thy breast ; and whatever may be our distress or necessity, let Thy fulness open its inexhaustible stores, and give us the all-sufficient supply of the Spirit. O may his blessed influences keep us in lively contrition of soul, in fervent zeal for

Thy name, in tender longings after the appropriation of Thee more and more to our hearts, and in every disposition which may demonstrate that we are with Thee now in fellowship, and shall be with Thee for ever in Thy perfected kingdom. O Jesus, hear us, and ever remember us in covenant truth. Amen.

NICODEMUS.

John iii. 1—10.

NICODEMUS was a principal man amongst the Jews, and one of the sect of the Pharisees. He was also a Ruler and rich. During the early part of our Lord's ministry, his mind was under some powerful degree of anxiety upon the subject of his pretensions, and of the truths which he taught; and being earnestly desirous to have the solution of his doubts, and to receive some relief from his solicitude, he determined upon visiting Jesus in person, and seeking counsel from him. This however he feared to do in the presence of the world, or before the observing eyes of his associates; and he therefore fixed upon the *night* as a suitable season, hoping under its shades to escape observation. When standing in the Lord's presence he addressed him with a respectful salutation, called him Master, and professed a belief that he came as a Teacher sent from God; for that his works were a sufficient demonstration that God was with him. To this salutation our Lord replied by immediately entering upon the essential doctrine of the new birth, hereby attacking Nicodemus at the very root of his prejudices, throwing him upon the reflections which were best calculated to produce *personal* conviction, and drawing forth a discovery of the extreme ignorance of his mind upon this important truth, which Jesus proceeded to remove by further explanation of the spiritual meaning of his words. Nicodemus, however, remained dark and incredulous, disputing or doubting the possibility of such things existing as Jesus had proposed to his faith; and in consequence he was sharply

rebuked for occupying so responsible and favourable a station in the professing church, and yet continuing ignorant upon these necessary subjects of knowledge and information. We are not possessed of any scriptural account of Nicodemus, until after this interview we find him towards the closing of Christ's ministry venturing to interpose against the unprincipled rage and malice of the chief Priests and Pharisees, and urging the illegality of their proceedings, seeing that they sat in judgment upon a man without having afforded him the opportunity of pleading his cause. His words were evidently attended with an unwelcome conviction upon the accusers, for they dissolved the assembly ; but they also brought upon Nicodemus an insulting reproach ; see John vii. 50—52. We next read of this man, in the interesting moment when, in fellowship with Joseph of Arimathea, he took down the body of Jesus from the cross, assisting in wrapping it up in the fine linen, and in depositing it in the sepulchre ; having also the same intention with his friend of giving a more honourable burial to those sacred remains, and largely contributing of his possessions towards this interesting service ; see John xix. 38—42.

We have had sufficient and repeated occasions for considering the tenets and the general character of the sect of the Pharisees, so that it is unnecessary to explain the views of religion which were expressed by Nicodemus ; he, as one of these people, no doubt embraced their opinions, customs, and prejudices. We know that by this sect, ambition, love of wealth, indulgence of the flesh, and arrogancy, and pride, were not deemed inconsistent with true religion ; that, in too many instances, to these were added confirmed hypocrisy and daring injustice. And that of all who opposed Jesus, blaspheming his person, and calumniating his cha-

racter, the Pharisees were the most desperate and determined. How far Nicodemus was implicated in the vices common to his sect, we know not, since he is introduced to us when first his mind had received some gracious impression ; but he was evidently in bondage, and fettered by the dread of those of his own party, from whom he expected to meet reproach, should he be supposed capable of yielding his attention for a moment to Jesus of Nazareth. Thus he tacitly approved and countenanced their principles, and evidenced that his own spirit had been hitherto in fellowship with theirs. Yet he was a *professor* of religion in the highest acceptance of the term, zealous for customs, traditions, ceremonies, and all external forms, and considered by his fellow men as amongst the number of zealous advocates for the divine law.

Notwithstanding all his conformity to Jewish prejudice and the opinions of men, it was not in the power of Nicodemus to exclude the solicitude which exercised his soul respecting Jesus. No doubt, there were many of his brethren equally agitated by the questions which were now so prevalent in Jerusalem respecting our Lord, some of these like himself being vessels of mercy, of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles as brought to saving faith ; but to none did Nicodemus communicate the state of his soul ; he brooded and reflected upon the events which were taking place, apparently without having awakened a suspicion in the minds of others respecting his sentiments. The expedient he adopted for the satisfaction of his mind was however a striking evidence of the extent of conviction and feeling by which his breast was troubled. His address was also the effect of strong operations of grace ; it was the expression of a mind preparing for that great victory of the Holy Ghost, by which human wisdom and the pride of nature are brought prostrate before

the teachings that are supernatural and heavenly. Much must have been effected in him ere he could salute Jesus of Nazareth as "Rabbi," "Master;" much must have been experienced in his affections ere he could respectfully say, "Thou art a teacher come from God." And it is evident that Nicodemus was under an influence of which he himself was not aware; for the Lord—the Spirit, was encountering his prejudices, assailing his strongholds, and preparing the way for his final discipleship. The ignorance and cowardice of his soul are however very conspicuous. He was *ashamed* of his emotion and came by night; and he wished to evade any thing like *personal* or *particular* interest in the inquiries ~~he~~ ^{he} was about to make; therefore he spoke as one of a multitude, *we* believe that thou art, &c. It is most probable that Nicodemus would depart from this interview *more* perplexed and anxious than when he sought it. He was not so liberated from the bondage of nature as to come out boldly and avow the Saviour, and he was involved in a degree of darkness upon spiritual subjects beyond what we perceive even in the most illiterate inquirers of that day. All which Jesus had discoursed upon was unintelligible to him, and he returned home evidently concealing that he had visited the Lord, making no present profession of the gospel, herding as usual with his former companions, but retaining an anxious and an observant spirit. Thus the seed of grace was sown in his heart, but lay buried beneath a load of corruption and infirmity. Its divine nature however was not to be destroyed, or its operation thwarted, by any human circumstances; and we begin to see the burst of the precious plant from the ground, when the cause of oppressed innocency was pleaded with an evident indignation of the proceedings of the priests. In this manifestation of the inward influences of his better life, we have the promise

of that blessed unfolding of the principle which led him to the resolution of confessing the Lord as Joseph had done, notwithstanding the sacrifice which it required of character, condition, and every thing hitherto most dear to him. It is rejoicing to behold him the companion of Joseph in the last interesting act performed for the body of Jesus ; and to perceive how these two persons, very similarly situated as to external circumstances, and equally restrained by worldly motives from confessing the name of Jesus during his comparative honour, were raised in triumph above their native propensities, and strong in faith even above many who had previously boasted greater things.

There is no character that has more of express likenesses in the world than that of Nicodemus, so far as his first views and sentiments are revealed ; and even amongst such as occupy similar offices in the church, it is no uncommon fact, that exactly his ignorance and prejudices are possessed and exhibited. A high profession of religion may be made, as these histories have perpetually shown us, without any of those pure and substantial blessings which belong to the kingdom of Christ ; but this is not all, men may be teachers of others by office, who have never been individually under the teachings of the Spirit, and may exercise their functions in apparent zeal, and with orderly exterior movements, when they are in truth unacquainted with the first and most requisite doctrines of the gospel. A man may be occupied in the round of ministerial duties which belong to his office as a minister, even with a strict attention to the decent forms of religion, and with earnestness to support the rules which belong to the community where he is appointed, but, with all this, live in the indulgence of undisciplined passions, or under the dominion of prejudices which are entirely opposed to the

spirituality of the gospel. Or even in such as are under the Spirit's preparatory work, there may be the awful prevalence of many natural principles and habits, which are sad entanglements to the soul, and hinderances to that open avowal of Jesus in his peculiar doctrine, and in his despised members, without which we cannot see the kingdom of God, since these are requisites inseparably attendant upon the new birth.

It is of great importance to receive the doctrine upon which our Lord more particularly discoursed with Nicodemus: without it, we have no hold upon the gospel revelation, since it positively declares man to be so born in sin as to be under a curse, and so severed from the Lord of life as to be in spiritual *death*. There are expedients by which sinners endeavour to establish a different statement, but they are delusive inventions; and there are methods by which men seek to admit the necessity of a new birth, correspondently with their *own* ideas of the state of human nature. A regeneration by the baptism of water—or a regeneration by a reformation of life—are palatable notions, and loved, taught, and insisted upon, by those who would avoid the necessity of contemplating the completely ruined, accursed, and helpless condition of man, and the admission of the sovereign, omnipotent, and gracious character of covenant acts to the sinner's soul. But these are not the simple truths revealed and taught by Jesus Christ, who decidedly shews that man must be born of water and of the *Spirit*: a doctrine expatiated upon and unfolded, as we shall see in future pages, by the inspired witnesses, who universally agree in shewing that heirs of glory are "*created anew*," and that they are predestinated to be conformed to the image of the Eternal Son, according to the rule of that divine sovereignty which disposes all that concerns the existence and perfection

of the church. If then we have so much of understanding, as to address Messiah with, “ Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God,”—let us have consistent humility wherein to conduct ourselves as his disciples ; not presuming to question his authority, or to dispute against his lessons, but receiving them in a mind bowing before revelation, and taking the word in simplicity as it is in the Scriptures themselves. If we have further light, and are inwardly persuaded of the superiority of those views which are professed by the more serious disciples of Jesus, let us take heed of quenching the Spirit. Alas ! there are many who long endure the misery of internal anxieties, that might quickly be relieved, were they not in bondage to men, and afraid of seeming solicitous upon points in which they would profess to be settled ; and even if the restlessness of this emotion induces them at length to make some attempt at certainty, it is under *cover* of the night, or of some dark subterfuge ; they dare not venture upon a disclosure of their real anxiety, but would seem to be moved only by such general feelings as belong to others with whom they are associated. There are instances wherein this disposition has literally assumed the same form as it was in Nicodemus ; persons have wished to hear some celebrated pleader for the pure doctrines of truth,—they would have liked to be privileged as they are who sit constantly under the sound of their voice ; but on the other hand, they consider themselves so distinguished by station, so well known by the public, that they cannot take this step without drawing general observation upon themselves ; they will therefore postpone their attendance to a more retired season, or will select such services as are observed in the shades of evening, or will slip hastily into the place of assembly, whilst none are apparently near to observe them, or will stand

at the outside of the door of the sanctuary, endeavouring to catch the sound, without being seen by those who are within. Such are the expedients of a coward, again and again practised from age to age, and reflecting the conduct of this ancient example. A work of grace will not however end thus. The Lord will destroy these corrupt reasonings, and bring forth the vessels of his mercy, cleansed from the drossy mixtures of nature. And it is very interesting to examine how, in many instances, the soul passes through a course very similar to that of the man whose case we have considered. Possibly after having made the experiment of hearing for himself what report had brought to his ears, he seems to have obtained little or no benefit; his respect for the subject, and for the servants of the gospel, is increased, but many of the things he heard were above his capacity, and some of them opposite to what his natural reasonings would admit; he continues in his former course, but he does not dismiss reflection, still his thoughts perpetually turn to the interesting theme, and he feels a certain drawing of his affections towards the revelation which strives with his carnal mind, and presses upon him to shake off his unworthy fears and confess the Saviour. The conflict however may be long and bitter. One fruit of his internal affections may appear. It sometimes occurs that in the society in which he mixes *saints* are reviled, he hears the calumny, scoffs, and scorn expressed by men of the world, against such as profess serious discipleship, he hears how their doctrines are traduced, their assemblies scandalized, and their proceedings maliciously canvassed. This he cannot endure. Coward as he is respecting his own professions, he feels an indignant blush upon his face, excited by movements of heart that prompt him to vindicate the cause. This he possibly will do, so far

as to suggest that, before such sentiments are broached or indulged, persons should be acquainted with the matter of fact. Feeble as is this token of respect for the mystical body of Christ, it will sometimes prove effectual, in stemming for a season the torrent of abuse ; not that it operates a change of sentiment in men, but it throws them upon themselves, causing them to retreat within the selfish care for their *own* character ; for they would not be thought *unjust* judges. This small attempt brings also a degree of scorn upon the advocate of the cause, and is the beginning of the reproach of the cross, which he must be made willing to endure. So wonderful are the ways of the Lord, that frequently he will evince his power to subdue all things to himself, by making persons of this description *more* than conquerors : they not only triumph over the temptations to cowardice, but are eminent for courage ; and will so marvellously display the efficacy of divine grace in their conversion, as to prove it a supernatural work which speaks the sovereignty of God. In such blessed instances there is a ready heart at length to own the Saviour, whatever sacrifices must be made—a love which will acknowledge him, however scorned or contemned by men—a sympathy with saints, leading to a firm agreement in every work of love—and an open demonstration of being animated by that one Spirit, who cements the redeemed body, and causes every member to contribute with devoted love in honouring the head. Let us be instructed by these examples, and learn that, as it is essentially requisite for Christ's disciples to confess him before men, so it is the pathway to sweetest joys and most substantial peace ; for happier are the moments passed with the faithful in fellowship with Christ, than all the days of imaginary honour spent in the service of nature and the world.

PRAYER.

WE humbly implore Thee, O Almighty God, to consider us as Thy own devoted children, and to give us those unspeakable delights, which are so richly spread as their repast. O treat us at Thy table as Thy favoured ransomed people, and bless us with Thy smiles, as Thy approved saints. Fain would we enjoy those pure and holy satisfactions which are only to be tasted in communion with Thee, and be joined to that little flock whose joyful business it is to follow and to glorify Thee. These are privileges, O Lord, which we know to be confined to the family of Thy grace; for so long as we are aliens and wanderers from home, we cannot feed upon the children's bread. O therefore do Thou create in us the childlike mind and heart, and give us the experience of passing from our native death to the eternal life that is in Christ. Suffer us not to be deceived by outward forms, or to be looking to partial human reformation for our religious course before Thee; but teach us, Lord, the absolute necessity of being born again; and what we understand not, by reason of our ignorance, perverseness, and prejudice, O do Thou teach us by Thy covenant power. We bless Thee for exciting within us the anxious care which belongs to an interest in spiritual things, and that Thou hast not left us in the state of carnal rest: far better is it, O Lord, thus to be solicitous, than to have any measure of the peace which is possessed by souls deceived and dead. O receive our gratitude, and confirm our holy earnestness to know Thee more and more. Blessed and gracious God, impart with these affections an increase of holy courage. O let us not be ashamed to confess Christ crucified; let us not be ashamed to unite

with his despised followers ; let us not be ashamed to vindicate his calumniated doctrines ; but with a fervent faith and honest love, O give us to own the name before which angels and blessed spirits above continually bow. We would have Thee enthroned in our hearts, and the Lord of all our powers. Thine, Lord, is the glory of all that Thou vouchsafest to bestow, and of all that Thou workest in us. O secure the glory visibly to Thyself, by calling us forth from an evil world, and giving us victory over an unbelieving heart. We beseech Thee for these blessings, for Thy own everlasting glory in the covenant of life. Amen.

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN.

John iv. 1—30. 39—42.

THE history of our blessed Lord has already presented us in some degree with the transactions recorded in this chapter, and we return to it only for the purpose of gathering what may belong to the character of the Samaritan woman, with whom Jesus conversed at the well near unto Sychar. Here our Lord was pleased to tarry whilst his disciples were gone into the city to purchase provision ; his body was wearied by labour, and he sat on the stones of the well that he might obtain some rest to his frame. Whilst thus situated, the woman whose case we are now to consider came forth from the city to draw water from the well ; and Jesus embraced this opportunity for entering into conversation with her. This he opened by asking her in the first place, to afford him the courtesy of a draught of water from her pitcher ; but she, perceiving by his habit that he was a Jew, objected to the request, as inconsistent with the national hatred and prejudices subsisting between the Jews and Samaritans ; to this uncivil and unfeeling conduct Jesus addressed a rebuke, showing her that she was committing an injury upon herself, since had she possessed a better mind and spiritual discernment, she would have forgotten her prejudices, and proffered a request to *him* for draughts of *living* water, which he would not have refused to her. Being utterly ignorant and unbelieving, she answered without attention to the description of *living* water of which Jesus spake, and observed that he had no means whereby to obtain the water from the spring in this well,

mingling her observations also with a reference to the *privileges* which she supposed herself already possessed of as a Samaritan, and as a daughter of Jacob. The reply of our Lord to this remark was intended to correct her carnal apprehensions, and to elevate her expectations beyond the idea of present or bodily advantages ; but she, still retaining her native carnality of mind, only requested the grant of what Jesus might have to bestow, as that which might save her the trouble of a journey to this spring for her daily supply. These observations failing to awaken in her mind any spiritual perceptions, our Lord addressed her with more immediate reference to her own circumstances, bidding her return home and bring her husband with her ; but she declared she had no husband. Being thus brought to an acknowledgment of her real circumstances, Jesus proceeded to demonstrate to her that she, with all her domestic concerns and past life, was perfectly known by him, and that in fact she was then living in an unlawful connection, and had the positive marks of depravity upon her. This testimony convinced the woman that he with whom she was conversing must be a prophet ; but passing by her own more immediate interests, she seized the occasion as affording a favourable opportunity for settling her mind respecting the disputed point between the Jews and Samaritans ; and our Lord, assuming a solemn and awful tone, testified to her that the Samaritans were deceived, but that in fact this subject was about to be settled in a way which perhaps neither Jew nor Samaritan expected ; Jehovah being ready to form a *spiritual* church that should acceptably worship him. To this solemn statement she answered by resolving all her expectations into the time when Messiah should come, satisfying herself that he would rectify error, and tell all things that are needful and right before

God. This expectation so expressed brought the interesting conversation to its climax, and Jesus instantly said, "I that speak unto thee am he." With this concluding sentence the Omnipotence of the eternal purpose entered her soul; filled with unspeakable and mingled affections of wonder and conviction, she left her water-pot, and returning into the city, called upon the inhabitants to listen to her relation of what had taken place, and to judge if this were not the Christ. She induced many to accompany her back to the well, who were persuaded of his person and glory, entreating him to tarry with them in their city for a season, and professing a steadfastness of faith in him, not merely because of the words of the woman, but by conviction arising out of their own observation, and from the power of his word applied to their own hearts!

It must be immediately evident to all, that at the time when Jesus first conversed with this woman, she was in a state of great transgression, and living in the habits which are directly opposite to all law, human and divine; she was depraved in her principles, and regarded not her character even in a moral sense; being as is evident, perfectly easy under her disgraceful circumstances, and destitute of all sensibility upon those subjects which ought to have been the most sacred with her. Probably this hardness in crime was confirmed by the known depravity of the place where she lived; for she would see herself encompassed by sinners equally notorious with herself; and being thus countenanced by numbers, would have less apprehension of any particular malignity in her course, or of any particular judgment awaiting her soul. The name of her city signifies 'Drunken,' and sensuality was probably the ruling law of its inhabitants; under the power of which it is un-

questionable that this woman lived as a willing slave.

Her religious tenets were equally corrupt. We have seen in our view of the first rise of this people, how much they were corrupted and blinded in this respect; and into this spirit the woman before us drank deeply; for her whole mind and affections were inflamed, intoxicated, and depraved in bigotry and cruel superstition. Abandoned as she was, she considered herself competent to enter into subjects of religious disputations—she could boast of a relationship to the patriarch Jacob, contend with national pride for national pre-eminence, talk of Messiah as of one in whom she had a right to confide and glory, and wear the semblance of having a zeal for information from such as might lead her into truth. These attendants upon her moral depravity, give her condition a still more frightful appearance; and we perceive to how many practical evils it conducted by the spirit she evinced towards our Lord. Bigotry had not only seared her conscience, but hardened her heart; so that the uncostly and common act of kindness which was solicited by an exhausted traveller, was unfeelingly denied, and the refusal made to stand upon a supposed *religious* zeal. By this disposition she was also carried away by an absorption of her thoughts in subjects foreign to personal religion, and would dispute upon any thing rather than attend to the application of the word to her own sins. She was destitute of self-knowledge, she wished not for further light, its approach was unwelcome, and she preferred to evade the particular point of Christ's words. Not having any spiritual discernment, she saw not a *necessity* for the living water—and not having any spiritual *appetite*, she could not appreciate its pure and salutary grace. If we examine her character as developed in the interview here recorded, it will

appear thus debased, and that there was an effort manifestly made, as the conversation became increasingly serious, to blunt the force of its direction to herself, and to escape its personal energy. These however, although evils of sufficient prominence to determine the nature of her disposition and spirit, were not obstructions before which the divine purpose could be discouraged or prove impotent: and when this effectual power was brought home to her soul, every strong hold was cast down, painful conviction rushed in upon her, a sight of all her past iniquities now forced itself upon her attention, she felt as if stripped at once of every false gloss and covering by which she had hitherto veiled herself from her own observation, and the recollection of her many offences from her first entrance upon life to that hour, seemed all at once to arrest her as a prisoner, and to pronounce her guilty and undone! Combined with this conviction, vigorous faith also put forth its energies. She believed that in Jesus she beheld the fulfilled promise, and hailed him as Messiah. Her fervent perceptions were now capable of penetrating through that veil of humiliation in which he stood before her; and with affectionate zeal she hastened to proclaim the glory she beheld, and laboured to induce her fellow-sinners to believe. Great was the change so suddenly wrought in her breast. Prejudice, insincerity, uncharitableness, fell before the power of the omnipotent Saviour; and affections of fervent devotion now animated her cleansed and released spirit. Thus she was added to the interesting and blessed company of sinners saved by grace, and became a faithful witness, whose word received the divine acknowledgment to the rescue of many fellow-sinners.

We have an affecting example in this woman,

both of the redemption of Jesus in its mighty character, and of the devotion of those hearts which are the subjects of this grace. And it is very exhilarating to poor sinners in this waste wilderness, thus to behold how the good shepherd seeks up his lost sheep, and effectually brings them to his fold. The same divine compassions now fill his breast, and whilst he is in the glorious heights above as our crowned Mediator, he is equally in the painful vale of tears below, fulfilling his character as the Saviour of the lost. In prosecution of this purpose, we may say, His omniscience is ever as it were traversing the desert, by putting forth its effectual presence in *acts* of recovering mercy ; and from day to day he is discharging this covenant undertaking with unwearied designs. In this respect there is a *needs be* for his blessed operations. The covenant gave him souls to be purchased by his blood and recovered by his Spirit. So long as there is one of these in the wilderness, Jesus *must needs* pass through it, since he cannot lose one of those whom the Father hath given him—nor deliver up the mediatorial kingdom, until he can say, “ Behold here am I, and the children whom thou hast given me,” presenting a *perfect* family. By the ministry of his servants, and the power of his word, he still enters the most miserable regions, and the most wretched hearts ; and could we look into the invisible world, we should behold in each moment as it flies some accession of joy to the blessed above, on account of an accession of numbers to the flock of Jesus in the world below. He is perpetually gathering his children, recovering wanderers, building up saints, and perpetuating the joyful examples of his victory over sin and death.

But how deeply should we abase ourselves, when we consider that the work of mercy finds us in

situations of moral depravity, and spiritual darkness, equal to the worst conception we can have of this Samaritan woman! We are bound by the chain of our sins, especially of our constitutional sin whatever it may be; and notwithstanding this awful captivity, we are equally insensible of our destitute and condemned state. It is a fearful truth that we are all in a state of *self-satisfaction*, notwithstanding impending woe: and that even if troubled on some one particular point, where sin is too glaring to be denied, we are adepts in inventions by which to produce some *compensation* (as we suppose) for this indulged breach. Like this deceived woman, we delude ourselves by the innumerable examples of depravity which surround us; thinking that at any rate our case is not worse than theirs; and so dismissing all solicitude, we give the reins to our favourite propensities, and continue a course of sin.

Amongst those who are thus living in practical denial of all true religion, it is most common to meet with violent disputers, and highly bigoted spirits. They, who have little to do in their own hearts, are usually most busy in discussing matters of religious difference, and most heated in the way in which they argue in support of their favourite system. This is one of Satan's cheats; he imposes upon some men by allowing them to imagine themselves zealous for religion, or for what they call rights; and by involving them in questions which gender strife rather than edification, he not only diverts them from the great subject, but plunges them into increase of sin. We are not therefore to be surprised, when we meet with persons totally ignorant of the spiritual revelation of Jesus, who will presume to take up arms in the cause of what they deem truth; and we are to expect that in such hearts there will be every evil of which we may accuse this Samaritan; prejudice, want of

candour, presumption, and want of mercy. Neither ought we to be unwilling to investigate ourselves upon this question ; for possibly if the grace of Jesus enters our hearts, it may have to contend with and subdue corruptions of this description. Surely the example before us should teach us to fear the deceitfulness of a heart that shrinks from the probe, the desirableness of coming to the light that we may ascertain what we really are ; and if our Lord has in much compassion come near to us, that we may supplicate for the full impartation of the blessings he has to give. We cannot have desires for the living water, unless we are experimentally taught that in our bosoms there is nothing but dry and barren desolation. So long as we fancy that there are streams and rivulets running through the soil, amply sufficient to satisfy our thirst, we are not in a state of preparation for the purer delights after which the regenerate pant ; but if we will contemplate our condition as it truly is, see how all is an inward waste, consider how utterly the streams we would cleave to shall be dried up and fail, and think upon the proffers of life and never-ending satisfaction which fall from the Saviour's lips ; we may probably be led to say in the sincerity of spiritual appetite, " Lord, give me this water !" give it me that I no more may frequent the perishing resources to which the sinner flees ! that I may never again thirst after objects that cannot satisfy, or drink of streams polluted by sin ! Assuredly we shall feel our pressing wants, if indeed the word of our Lord has penetrated our hearts ; conviction of guilt, the retrospect of past years, the confounding sense of transgressions that have filled up a fearful measure, and the burst of light now entering upon the mind, and giving a view of the nature of eternity, will all combine to render the refuge proposed in Jesus unspeakably dear, and the heart restless until it

obtains some appropriating power of faith. This will lead into an earnest acceptance of the testimony, and flowing out from this union with Jesus, will be the charities of *genuine* zeal, a spirit inviting fellow-sinners into life, and cheerfully proclaiming the grace and glory of him whose convincing word we have felt.

To this holy existence let us each labour to become devoted ; let us remember how the Saviour is now travelling through the earth, seeking his lost souls, tarrying in secret regions where he pleases to take up his abode, opening the ordinances, and sending his witnesses forth. And for this act of sovereign mercy, let us unfeignedly bless him, rejoicing in the prosperity of his arm which bringeth salvation, and by which the sheep and the lambs are gathered into peace. May he thus speak with efficacy to us individually, and make us able to testify that he is ours by the conscious operation of his Spirit in our hearts.

P R A Y E R.

O most blessed and everlasting God, to whom it belongeth to visit the earth according to Thy own sovereign will, bringing salvation and gathering Thy ransomed ones to the glory of the cross of our dearest Lord, we lift up our souls unto Thee as the source of all life and light, we wait beneath Thy altar that we may receive Thy gracious love. O give us our all-sufficient portion in this blessing, and fill our affections with rest in Thee. We beseech Thee, O Lord, to accept the earnest desires which now arise to Thee for the grant of those living waters, which are bestowed upon thirsty souls ; and that the appetites now alive within us may be abundantly blest from this inexhaustible source. Blessed be Thy name, O Lord, for having

entered into this evil world with such designs of love as are revealed in the gospel of peace ; we give Thee all honour and praise for the redemption established in Thy dear Son, and for the opening of that covenant which is perpetually dropping down blessings upon man. O may we be within the precious bond of that covenant, and so placed under its influence, that our souls may be vigorous in Thee. Convince us of the folly and guilt attendant upon the paths which sinners tread, and of the sorrow to which they tend ; and make us to love the voice that calls us to the way of holiness, and bids us press to highest joys. O that we may be so persuaded by the power of Thy word, as to be entirely won to the service of Thy cross ; and may we so receive Thee into our hearts as the Lord our Holy One, that every affection may be engrossed by Thee : cast down the prejudices, pride, and insincerity of our evil nature ; O level every high thing that exalts itself against Thy dominion ; and make us lovingly to submit our minds and souls to those divine teachings which fall from Thy sacred lips. O that we may be filled with ardent zeal in this sacred cause, and by every new discovery which we make of Thy glorious power and love, be animated to proclaim Thy salvation with increasing zeal. Bless our witness to all to whom we may speak of Thee. O enable us to testify in life and speech, how truly Thou hast searched and sanctified our souls ; and may we rejoice in beholding others flocking to Thy standard, and crowning Thee with honour. O Jesus, thus anoint us with Thy blessed unction, and keep us in Thy faith and fear. Amen.

BARNABAS.

Acts iv. 36, 37.

BARNABAS is introduced to us by the relation of that happy and privileged condition of the church, when a spirit of unity and self-denial animated the body; every disciple had a heart to share a brother's interest, and every hand was ready to administer of what was possessed for the support, or relief of the redeemed family. Amongst these, Barnabas is mentioned as one, who, having land, sold it for the benefit of the church, and delivered up the price to the disposal of the Apostles for the general good. This man was a Levite, a man of Cyprus; his original name was Joses, but on account of the eminent grace he possessed, as an instrument of comfort to others, he was by the church surnamed Barnabas, which signifies "the son of consolation." He is supposed to have been one of the seventy disciples whom Jesus sent forth, and to have been much advanced in years at the time when he took so public a part in the interests of the Gospel, after the ascension of our Lord. He is mentioned very frequently in the course of the Acts of the Apostles, being a zealous labourer, and for some time associated with the Apostle Paul. In Acts xi. 22, we find him selected by the church at Jerusalem, for the service of travelling to Antioch, that he might there edify and comfort the converts who were added to the flock; and in this passage we learn somewhat more of the particular character of the interesting ambassador, "he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." verse 24. Finding the great opening for usefulness which

the Lord had granted in this place, he resolved to continue with the infant Church, and, in order to further the cause, he journeyed to Tarsus, that he might find Saul who was now a convert ; and having induced him to unite in labour with him, they both returned to Antioch, where for a whole year they laboured in concert. A prophetic intimation of an approaching famine induced these disciples to make a contribution for the relief of the brethren in Judea, which they immediately sent to the Elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul ; but when the commission was fulfilled, they returned to Antioch, see chap. xii. 25, accompanied by John Mark, a young man and nephew to Barnabas. The eternal Spirit abundantly rested upon the flock in this place ; many eminent prophets and teachers were gifted for the furtherance of the kingdom of Christ amongst them ; and now it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, to separate from them Barnabas and Saul, that they might go forth as witnesses to a wider compass of the earth. The Spirit having signified this appointment, the brethren acceded with cheerful faith ; and they sent them forth with prayers and blessings, committing them and the cause they were pleading, to the protection of the Lord. They took with them John Mark, and prosecuted their way, preaching and testifying of Jesus wherever they came, and receiving the divine acknowledgment of their work ; but they were also exposed to many perils and toils, at which Mark taking alarm, he resolved to leave them, and returned back to Jerusalem. At Antioch in Pisidia, their word was particularly blest ; both Jews and Gentiles were stirred up to attend to the sacred testimony ; the latter, especially, with anxious inquiries, pressed upon Barnabas and Saul, who expounded to them the great salvation, and exhorted those who heard, to be steadfast in the faith. Their success was viewed

with envy by many Jews, who, with their accustomed obstinacy, resisted and blasphemed the gospel, stirring up a persecution against the ambassadors of the Lord, and expelling them out of their coasts. This violence was attended with increase of holy boldness in the servants of the Lord, who now passed into Iconium, leaving the disciples in the experience of great joy, and in the Holy Ghost. chap. xiii. At Iconium they preached the gospel in the midst of violent opposition, and were obliged to make their escape to Lystra and Derbe ; where they also testified of Jesus, and where they were at first treated as if they were gods, by the deluded idolaters, and were called upon to resist the attempt made to honour them with divine worship. But the scene was speedily changed, through the intrigues of certain Jews from Antioch, who followed the disciples and prejudiced the people, so that they laid violent hands upon them, and stoned Paul, leaving him for dead ; but he being raised up by the merciful power of the Lord, returned with the disciples into the city, and the next day accompanied by the faithful Barnabas, set forth to return to Antioch. On this journey they zealously laboured, blessings attending them both to the ignorant and the churches ; and having reached the sacred little spot from whence they had been sent forth, they rehearsed all that the Lord had done by them in the ears of the assembled believers ; particularly how the grace of the Lord to the Gentiles had been displayed, see chap. xiv. The peace of this little church was soon afterwards disturbed by the arrival of certain judaizing teachers, who caused some agitation, by insisting upon the observance of circumcision by the Gentile converts. In order to bring this question to an end, it was determined to send an embassy to the elders at Jerusalem, that the subject of dispute might be canvassed in a general assembly.

Barnabas and Paul, with some others, were chosen for this service. They were deemed suitable ambassadors, as having had opportunity to observe the dispensation of the Spirit towards the Gentiles, and being able to speak from experience, of this important mission to the heathen. The general assembly having determined what judgment to give, they were sent back with the result, to the Christians at Antioch, along with Judas and Silas, men of eminent faith and zeal. Acts xv. 1, 2, 12, 25, 27. After some space, Judas returned home, but Silas preferred to remain, uniting his labour with the zealous advocates at this place. It was soon after this, that Barnabas was carried away into error, according to what is related in Gal. ii. 13, being influenced through the example of Peter to act in a spirit of inconsistency, upon the important question of the liberty of the Gentiles. He is also before us in the close of the xvth chapter of Acts, under an infirmity of spirit. Paul having proposed to him a visit to the different places where they had lately been united in work, he consented, but determined to take his nephew with him, who having deserted them on a former occasion, Paul considered not a suitable attendant. Barnabas was not willing to yield his opinion; and the contention was so sharp between these eminent disciples, that they finally separated, choosing distinct branches of labour; Barnabas, taking with him Mark, sailed to Cyprus; and Paul choosing Silas, departed, passing through Syria and Cilicia. This is all which is recorded of Barnabas, but sufficient to afford us a very interesting exhibition of character.

The *natural* character of Barnabas seems to have been one of benevolence. It is probable the appellation *good* is given him in this sense; not so much signifying *gracious*, as amiable, kind,

compassionate, according to the acceptance of the term in Rom. v. 7. He seems to have been naturally of a forgiving, yielding temper, and to have possessed respect and esteem on this ground. But this is not the only appellation given him ; he is declared *gracious* also, for he was filled with the Holy Ghost and faith. The ever-blessed Spirit took up his abode in him as a consecrated and chosen vessel, and wrought in him those precious dispositions which belong only to such as are born again. The affections of Barnabas, therefore were more than *natural charities* in him ; love and compassion were sanctified to their *gracious* use ; and the Lord was pleased to open a channel through which his benevolence might flow to the richest and most abiding purposes. His disinterested love embraced *Jesus*. This was the great object of the faith of his soul ; the Holy Ghost abiding in him as a teacher of those blissful truths which belong to salvation, and uniting him to the living head with living faith. The same Spirit, through the same grace of faith, carried him to embrace the *saints*, these were the objects most precious to him next to the Saviour ; and *in* his Saviour, and for them he was ready to sacrifice every consideration of selfish interest ; being only desirous to have his portion with the little flock. In the manifestation of this disinterested affection, he was eminent ; he sold his lands. This, indeed, many others did with equal devotedness of heart. But he seems to have contributed bodily labour also for the increase of the fund, or for the *sparing* of funds ; since Paul speaks of him, 1 Cor. ix. 6, as if he wrought with his hands for his own support, having surrendered all that he formally independently possessed. His was also a life of mental and spiritual labours, attended with peculiar sufferings and persecutions, all which he endured voluntarily, from love to Jesus and his people, and in the

discharge of which it is evident, he maintained a spirit of patience, perseverance, and sympathy, that could only arise out of that sacred spring already described as opened in him by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. There was also much humility displayed in this course of suffering labour, since he was apparently always ready to act in concert with Paul, as with one whose joint efforts were valuable to him, and to whom, although younger than himself, he was willing to yield what apparently universally attended him, a greater degree of popularity than was possessed by himself. Paul is styled the chief *speaker*. Acts xiv. 12. But he was by no means chief, or beyond Barnabas, in the fervour of true devotion and simplicity, or in the zeal with which he testified against whatever was a dishonour to his Lord: herein there was evidently a holy and blessed equality in these two witnesses. It is particularly declared of Barnabas, that he was most gifted as a *comforter*,—a gift of singular worth at all times, but perhaps never more needed, or estimable, than in the period of his ministration. It is true that the Great Comforter, the Holy Ghost, abundantly rested in the breasts of all the disciples in the first age, for they are always described as walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost; but there were many tribulations, much persecution, and great straights to which the church was constantly exposed; and as the Holy Ghost works through instruments in many of his visitations, it was an unspeakable privilege, both to Barnabas, and to those in connection with him, that he was appointed to be “the son of consolation.” In this appointment we may perceive the wisdom and goodness of the Lord. Such a service was best suited, and must have been most acceptable to the naturally benevolent and affectionate disposition of Barnabas. And no doubt it would be a welcome office to

him, when, whilst faithfully testifying of *tribulation*, chap. xiv. 22, he could pour in the healing words drawn from the covenant, and shew how in every condition, "God is love." The affectionate and sympathetic grace of his heart as a believer is shewn in chap. xi. 23. The sight of sinners possessed of the Spirit's grace, and of immortal souls training up for the eternal inheritance, gladdened his heart : his natural sensibilities were filled with the glowing flame of spiritual devotion ; and he uttered his earnest affection in exhortations full of faith and power. Thus his was a practical benevolence, sanctified by divine grace, active in the highest tone of its existence, and animated by one single object, the advancement of Jesus' glory.

Notwithstanding these great excellencies, Barnabas has given us an affecting demonstration of the truth that there is not a just man who doeth good and sinneth not. His natural disposition was in some instances a snare to his soul ; his yielding and unsuspecting temper causing him to make concessions, and to encourage expectations which experience and caution should have prevented. It was this infirmity which led him into the peril of giving his countenance to the dissimulation of which the Apostle Paul complains. Gal. ii. 13. Not that *he* is charged with any degree of this sin, he appears to have acted with his usual simplicity and sincerity ; but he was carried away by the sin in others, so as to allow his judgment to be for a season imposed upon ; and his opinion, instead of being consistently stedfast in what he had before known to be approved and scriptural, was thereby rendered apparently versatile. He was too much disposed to comply with the desires of men whom he wished to greet in peace, and too little alive to the recollection, that the most eminent saints are capable of being in error, and therefore not to be

implicitly followed. His prejudice in favour of Mark was probably of this description of feeling. It appears, that Paul departed with more manifest tokens of the approving opinion of the brethren on that occasion. Mark was indeed, as afterwards appears, sincerely sorry for his former departure : but there had not been a sufficient time for the public evidence of his restoration ; and it would appear that Barnabas allowed his relative affection, and natural benevolence, to exceed the limits which, in his public office and character, ought to have been observed. That these were latent evils in the feelings of Barnabas, is evident ; otherwise he would not have been betrayed into the obstinacy, and hastiness of temper, which led to a separation from his beloved companion Paul. On both sides there was an infirmity of spirit ; for contentions between brethren should never be thus sharp or severe ; these are affecting examples of the nature and power of indwelling sin ; but we are not to charge upon this man of God a want of sincerity, or a declension in love : his heart was as ever the surrendered possession of the Lord ; and this mixture of dross, betrayed on these occasions, would unquestionably be consumed by the discipline of the Spirit ; for he will not suffer sin upon the vessels of eternal mercy. Let us glorify the God of salvation for the excellent grace which shone through the habitual course of this believer, and love his memory, as of one in whom Jesus our Lord has been magnified.

We cannot have a more striking example of the great difference of *natural* virtue and of *supernatural* grace, than is afforded us through this character. We have had frequent occasion to observe, that there is a distinction to be made in this respect, and that *constitutionally* men may be very different in disposition and habits, without the

peculiar difference of a state of nature and grace ; human benevolence will in some instances powerfully actuate the fallen sons of men, leading them to the work of mercy and compassion in things natural and temporal ; but when *merely* natural, however amiable they may be in respect of the ties of this life, they are not unfrequently the *most* opposed to what is spiritual and eternal. Such dispositions are prone to centre their interests in the affairs of time, in the interests which concern the *bodies* of men ; and, when looking to eternity, are so averse to what they think severe or alarming, that they accommodate revelation to their own feelings, and think of and represent Jehovah as so merciful that his *justice* is *lost* in this overpowering attribute. So far will this betray a natural man, that he can even turn from the idea of atonement and propitiation, as if these were doctrines too dreadful to be contemplated. In instances where there are clearer views of the way of salvation, a naturally benevolent disposition may be a constant snare ; the spirit shrinks from saying what would give pain to another, or from insisting upon what will occasion separation between the saint and sinner ; and although the Scripture insists upon the necessity of conviction of sin, and of renouncing all fellowship with the works of darkness, the tenderness of *nature* pleads for exception, and disposes the heart to yield in points where even the express gospel standard is involved. Nor is it possible for us fully to describe the mischief, and misery, which frequently arise merely from the want of sufficient firmness, or from the expression of too much unsuspecting confidence by those who are naturally thus disposed ; all sufficiently proving to us, that there may be great danger in the expression even of those dispositions which are the most amiable, and that human benevolence must not be confounded with the holy charity of faith. On this point therefore

let us be upright and vigilant, guarding against the influence of partiality, or of any mere natural tenderness, when opposed to the requirements of the cross of Christ.

We may truly rejoice, when we consider the innumerable perils to which we are exposed, that the everlasting covenant has provided so abundant an antidote to evil, in the supply of the Spirit, through whose blessed influence the affections are sanctified, and human propensities made either subservient to the work of the gospel, or are crucified and brought down. When he is pleased to operate we shall experience the omnipotence of such undertakings ; for he comes in the majesty of infinite power and will, and to him all things are subject. The natural benevolence of the heart is made to yearn in a spiritual direction over the souls of sinners ; solicitude for the comfort of body or mind is under the dictates of principle derived from above ; and this sympathy lives in a spirit of self denial, and will encounter difficulty, and surrender personal conveniencies, if by any means the eternal interests of the soul may be advanced, and the gospel commended. It is not to be denied that, in many instances, the possession of *natural* benevolence is an unspeakable blessing, as acted upon by grace. Not that it lends any effectual power as co-operating with the Spirit, in works which it remains for him alone to effect ; but it yields a precious sweetness to the measure, and feeling, with which the work of faith is performed ; and frequently prepares the possessor for being in an eminent degree "the son of consolation." From these the precious strain of wisdom, mixed with tender commiseration, will frequently flow into the heart of the mourner, the afflicted, the persecuted, the sinner, according to the several circumstances of the case ; for not only is there in *experience* a spring of sympathy, but in the natural character

there is a peculiar readiness to enter into the necessities and trials of a fellow creature, as if they were really of personal importance. We may with propriety earnestly desire an ability thus to "speak comfortably;" there is no service in the church more eminent or useful; and amidst the many painful exercises to which poor souls are liable in such a scene of conflict as is here below, happy are they who can by the blessing of the Lord raise up the disconsolate, cheer the fearful, and so open the door of the eternal kingdom, as to reveal the unsearchable riches of Christ. This is given through the powerful indwelling of the Comforter in our hearts, who is pleased thus to shed his own sacred grace through us into the hearts of others; and therefore it is for the presence of this Divine Lord within us that we should supplicate, stirring up our affections into lively exercise, by all those holy recollections which both as saints and sinners should be familiar in our hearts. And let us also, whilst rejoicing in that measure of a Comforter's spirit which may be given us, watch the movements of our own temper, and cherish that humility which will put us upon forbearance, and make us ready to concede where we conscientiously may, rather than cause divisions,

PRAYER.

O most blessed and gracious God, vouchsafe to give us the divine Comforter, by whose blessed unction we may be animated and furthered on our heavenly way; and since we owe our life to Him as the indwelling Author of all our appropriation of Thee, O give us to experience the consolations likewise, which this possession is intended to impart. Make us Thy children by the everlasting covenant, that we may inherit the joys of salvation in their largest extent; and thus make us to live

as instruments of peace and joy to others, that we may be sons of consolation in Thy church. We behold ourselves surrounded by objects of misery and need ; we know that we are thrown into connexion with hearts that are liable to pain and grief ; and experience has proved to us, that in the midst of Thy little flock, there are innumerable instances of souls that are sighing under a sense of sin, of bereavement, or darkness. To all of these Thou hast spoken mercifully in Thy word, and hast supplied us with a testimony which we may proclaim without money or price. O give us wisdom and power thus to act ; and teach us resolutely and earnestly to wrestle with Thee for an ability to use Thy word faithfully, tenderly, and patiently, as the case may require. O sanctify to us the experience of our own hearts, that we may learn by the knowledge of ourselves to sympathize with others ; and may we be ever ready to minister in the mind of our Lord, and to our ability, that the mourners in this world may be helped in looking to the refuge which is opened for the weary. Come quickly, blessed Saviour, and take us to the world where tears and griefs are gone for ever, and where temptations and infirmities will try us no more. O give us rest with Thee, ere long, in Thy abode of bliss ; and number us with such as, having come out of great tribulation, have washed their robes, made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and stand for ever in Thy presence, singing the triumphs of Thy name. Animate us by the prospect of Thy approaching rest, to endure the evils of the world with cheerful faith ; and O grant that our affections may become so spiritual and devoted to Thy cause, that all other interests may be absorbed in this, and self-denial mark our walk of love. Blessed and everlasting Jehovah, fulfil these our petitions for Thy tender mercies' sake in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.

Acts v. 1—4.

WE have a very different view of character afforded us on this occasion, to that which last engaged our attention, and are addressed with great force by the example of an abounding iniquity, in the breasts of some who were possessed of every opportunity for knowledge, and surrounded by the most striking practical lessons of the nature of the gospel. Ananias and Sapphira were persons who professed to be fully influenced by these advantages, and of whom the rest of the disciples seem to have had no suspicion; they were each intent upon maintaining credit in the church, and wished to have a rank amongst such as were most forward in acts of self-denial. As the surrender of worldly goods seemed to be one of the most probable means of securing the credit at which they aimed, they resolved upon making a sacrifice which they hoped would serve to establish their character before men; and having lands, they sold them, professing to give the whole of what they might amount to in money, to the service of the flock. This however was not their real intention; for by mutual consent they agreed to keep back half the price, reserving it for their own private use. This iniquity was revealed to Peter, by an immediate act of the Holy Ghost upon his mind; who, discerning the spirits of these wretched hypocrites, was made instrumental to expose and punish their crime;—Ananias being first addressed in solemn words of rebuke and denunciation, followed by his instant death; and Sapphira next, coming in when this judgment had

just been past upon her husband, and deliberately confirming the false statement which he had made to the Apostle, receiving a similar sentence, and falling down a lifeless corpse ! This awful event is said to have filled the flock with godly fear, and to have been instrumental in deterring hypocrites from attempting to join the church ; but it by no means obstructed the increase of the real body, for multitudes were daily added to the church of sincere and devoted believers.

We can have no hesitation in determining that these sinners were in a state of awful condemnation ; their guilt is immediately perceived. But we must give a more particular attention to the nature of their offence, and to the influence under which they acted, since there are many very important instructions conveyed to us through the depravity which is visible in this history. In the purpose which they had in view, they had but one mind and will ; therefore we include them both in the sin as equally culpable. Ananias seems first to have proposed the act, to which Sapphira as readily consented, being privy to it with an acquiescing mind ; and it is most probable they well understood their congeniality of character in this respect, for there was apparently no hesitation in communicating this design, or doubt of cordiality in prosecuting it. The great instigator to the crime was the devil ; for Peter thus appeals to the wretched sinner, “ Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost ? ” The temptation arose from the evil one, but it operated upon an evil nature, and affections with which Satan was in agreement, and which could assimilate with him. The *consent* of the depraved will was therefore ready, and the thought being conceived, it was matured and brought forth, in the full manifestation of the offence. Thus the progress of the

temptation is marked by the apostle; he directs us to the origin of the suggestion as from Satan, but he puts the question of "*Why* hath," pointing to the fact, that the devil could not have taken such possession of the will, without some voluntary consent on the part of the sinner; and further shewing, in the following verse, that the purpose had been *conceived in the heart* of Ananias, agreeing with the statement which the apostle James makes, chapter i. 14, 15.

The particular evil principles, giving advantage to the tempter, were ambition and covetousness. Ambition moved to the desire of having eminence, and a name that should be highly extolled by men. To them it appeared most eligible to secure it by apparent sacrifices for the church. But covetousness interfered with this method, for, ere this could be insured, they must seem, like other brethren, equally willing to part with *all*: but from so great a surrender, their hearts started back; and the love of filthy lucre was too deeply-seated in their hearts to allow of the total relinquishment of every part of their possessions. To this sacrifice they were not called, either from any law of God, or any requirement from the infant church. In this respect men were left to their own choice and judgment, either to give all, or a proportion, or none of their worldly goods; so that Ananias and his wife were under no obligation to bring the offering. But they ardently coveted fame, and devotedly loved their wealth; and there appeared to them no other way of gratifying *both* these passions but by this desperate act of hypocrisy.

There were great aggravations in the offence of these sinners, chiefly in the deliberate hypocrisy, which contained in it an act of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; it being a denial of the omniscience of Jehovah, and a daring resistance of all

those striking evidences which they had contemplated in the gospel kingdom, of the power and jealousy of the Holy Ghost in the interest of that gospel. They had reason to believe that *He* was acquainted with, and might punish them for this deed ; they ought to have known that he is a heart-searching and heart-detecting God ; they had heard of his operations in men, and that he bestowed upon them the discerning of spirits ; yet, in defiance of all these solemn considerations, they ventured upon the act, thereby seeming as if they hoped to impose upon him by a lie, and to be suffered to escape exposure and punishment. Thus they were in fact offering a challenge to the Holy One, and daring his power ! The attendant perseverance in falsehood which was evinced, added to their crime. No remorse or misgivings of conscience checked their career, and no confusion seems to have appeared in the wretched Sapphira ; with unblushing and fearless effrontery she could calmly say, when interrogated by the apostle, “ Yea, for so much.” Thus it became manifest that there was a total want of faith, the absence of all real zeal, and the reigning power of selfishness, covetousness, and practical infidelity. Their overthrow was tremendous, leaving no space for repentance. In the midst of their crime, they were hurried away to the eternal prison, under an irrevocable sentence of condemnation ; receiving the reward of their confederacy in sin, by an association in the everlasting burnings, where the righteous vengeance of the Almighty executeth its fierce and never to be allayed fury.

Such truths should affect our minds, as they did the church of Christ at the period of their first occurrence, filling our souls with holy fear. They are no doubt recorded for this end ; and unless

they produce in us correspondent feelings, they are not savingly beneficial to us as believers. Our Lord has forewarned us, in his discourses, of the malicious attempts of Satan; he has shewn us that he will employ himself in sowing tares amongst the wheat, that hereby he may disgrace and discourage the church. To these warnings he has added the record of examples, that we may not doubt the reality of the awful testimony; and thus we are furnished with incontrovertible evidence of the desperate malignity of the powers of darkness, and of the desperate depravity of sinful hearts. Upon these, Satan is ever acting in a variety of forms; taking occasion, by existing circumstances, to suggest evil designs, and to excite and enflame the corrupt passions of the breast. When powers of this kind meet, and there is no vigilant or sanctified will to guard the soul, or to put in pleas in behalf of better principles, we may expect that the issue will be foul and fatal; the suggestions of Satan are received and fostered, and the perfected fruit of this confederacy is produced. When such results follow in persons professing the faith of Jesus, it is a cause for great sorrow, and general humiliation and fear. More injury is done to the influence of religion upon the world by traitors in her own bosom, than by the most flagrant acts of violence and oppression committed against her by the world; and this will necessarily be a source of grief to real saints. It is also such a full evidence of the possibility of being a high professor of Christianity, even in its apparently low and despised condition, without being influenced by vital principles of faith, that the humble will be made to tremble, and watch and pray, lest any accursed thing should lurk undetected in their hearts, or temptation prevail against their souls. On such occasions they understand, with a peculiar power, the scripture

exhortation, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." How gracious is our Lord, in thus attending the dreadful falls of professors with his sheltering and sanctifying grace to the upright! and how wonderfully does this demonstrate his unwearied thought for the prosperity of his chosen! So far from such lamentable evils affecting the life or health of the true members, by his grace they are rendered instrumental to good; for they stir up the faithful to increased devotion—put them upon proving their own selves, whether they be in the faith—and upon looking well to the foundation of their hope. The retribution of the Lord, upon such as deliberately commit heinous sins in a spirit of hypocrisy, will frequently be visible in this life: and whilst we contemplate the sin, we should also look to its consequences upon the offender; for sometimes the Lord will vindicate the dishonoured gospel before men, or will expose hypocrisy, that all may see how he hateth evil, and that no cloak of maliciousness shall impose upon him, or prejudice his righteous judgment in favour of the hypocrite. Thus he in many instances *prevents* evil, deterring the wicked from making a false profession, and teaching men the expediency of counting the cost, before they intrude into the sacred ark.

No condition can be more awful than that of hypocrisy in a religious profession. It would seem to us an *unreasonable* act, promising nothing of good, which might deceive the mind, and certainly leading into many possible inconveniences, from which nature is disposed to shrink. But we can account for this apparent inconsistency, when we consider the blindness and infatuation which attend the dominion of a fallen nature. By such the glorious perfections of Jchovah are unapprehended—sin is not understood in its truly malignant character—eternal objects are but dimly seen

through a mist of ignorance and prejudice—the heart indulges some vain hope of escape from punishment by inventions of its own devising—and religion, when viewed as divested of its peculiar spirituality, and as attended with some certain kind of distinctions, may afford to such dispositions an encouraging prospect for *fleshly* gratification. The love of pre-eminence is a very powerful passion in many breasts, and if it cannot be obtained in *worldly* pursuits, it will be sought in things which are religious. Here a man may obtain a high character for sanctity, zeal, liberality, or have an opportunity to display eloquence, attract multitudes, or become a subject of conversation and attention; all this is flattering to nature, and forms a violent temptation to hypocrisy; so that, under the influence of such expectations, sinners will be found in every age, who are capable of assuming the lying pretensions which we contemplate with such horror in Ananias and Sapphira. By these considerations we not only come to some understanding of the origin of evil in others, but should learn the great duty of self-jealousy, especially of watchfulness against the love of pre-eminence, in whatever form or degree it may exist within us. The ambition of a Christian mind is a sanctified affection, which centres in the desire of having *Jesus* exalted; so that, whilst emulous to be numbered with such as are eminent in the Saviour's service, it is devoid of *selfish* desires—it presses after the highest measure of devotion, as an evidence of love and gratitude, but not that it may *display* its own energies—and being an honest fervour of the heart, it holds nothing back which may in any degree contribute to the furtherance of *Jesus'* glory amongst men. But the mere love of being pre-eminent is very different—it centres in the desire of having *self* honoured: others may exceed in devotion or love, without occasioning

him any discomposure, if his personal glory be not thereby diminished. His aim is to be conspicuous, known, celebrated ; and this can very well consist with a talkative pretence of self-denial, whilst secretly the heart is full of its covetousness. How deadly and dangerous is such a species of hypocrisy ! O let us not amuse ourselves with a profession of this description, but consider well the final shame and dishonour to which it will conduct, even if not exposed to the judgment of men here in this life. To prevent this evil, we should cultivate a deep and habitual sense of the omniscience of the Lord, of his detecting hatred of sin, and of the fearful issue of all such offences as are directed against those divine perfections which Jehovah stands engaged to vindicate.

We have a very forcible evidence in this history, of the fatal effects which follow unhallowed connections : and we ought not to pass by this subject without calling to mind the repeated testimony which the scriptures give, of the ruin attendant upon confederacies between sinners. And when persons are united by the conjugal tie, there is a more especial peril, because temptation obtains tenfold advantage by the nearness of the bond and of the association. Possibly there are sins devised, and perpetrated, by one of the parties so united, without the full consent of both ; but if *privy* to them, and acting in such a way as not to discountenance, dissuade, or warn against them, we become partners in the guilt ; and it is worthy the serious inquiry of many who are situated so as to have an associate whose principles are not right before God, how far they are or are not agreed together in a course of falsehood and insincerity ! It is not uncommon for persons, who make a religious profession, to be perfectly agreed as to the *boundary* they have prescribed to themselves, meaning to go so far, and no farther, except in what

belongs to *external* devotion—they agree together to *keep back part*. There are others who do not scruple to rid themselves of responsibility, by excusing all the inconsistencies of domestic arrangements, observance of pleasures, &c. of this world, and even their own indwelling sins, by casting the blame upon their partner. It is said to be his or her will, or spirit, or party, or plan ; and at the same time it is perfectly manifest, that though seeming to object in the hearing of others, they are privy to it all, and have a secret agreement together for the pursuit ; whatever be its peculiar nature, it is entered into with avidity, or has not been discountenanced either in resolution, or in love. What is all this but the sin of Ananias and Sapphira in a different form ?—the sin of a wilfully deceived heart—of a hypocritical profession, and a lie to the Holy Ghost, who stands engaged to demonstrate sooner or later, that he has seen through these abominations, and abhorreth the deceiver ! And very affecting is the thought, that in such lamentable unions, where there is no fear of God, no faith, no love of the Saviour, the prospect beyond this life is one of a union in the harvest which ensues from such a seed time, each unhappy sinner being consigned to everlasting punishment, and made witnesses of each other's woe. Should not this view of the two offenders, on whose transgression we have been reflecting, awaken the the holy desire of being delivered from such miseries ? and ought we not to put forth new purposes in the strength of the Lord, to form no connections but what will afford the prospect of mutual edification ? and to discharge our own responsibility in those which we have already formed, by faithfulness in stemming the tide of evil, by cautions against the admission of temptation, and by using our influence for the detection and destruction of Satan's devices. Thus let us

act, with gratitude to the eternal Spirit, who has caused these things “to be written for our learning.”

PRAYER.

ETERNALLY blessed and gracious God, we humbly supplicate for those divine manifestations, which Thou art able and willing to give to the inward man ; and pray Thee, that our whole soul may be under the blessed influence of Thy converting grace. Awaken within us, O Lord, the recollection of those awful scenes to which we are each hasting, and of that heart-searching presence under which we are each living, so that we may be excited to seriousness and integrity in all our walk before Thee. O deliver us, blessed Lord, from the suggestions of the enemy of our salvation ; and grant that we may remember with holy awe the deceitfulness of our own hearts. Suffer us not to be led into the snare of the devil ; and O let us not be deluded by the mischievous and destroying delusions of indwelling sin. We desire to make such a profession of the faith as it is in Jesus, as shall be the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work ; and that our affections may be so devoted to Thee that nothing may obstruct their entire and sanctified course. Let no covetous desires after the perishing world, and no vain expectation of present honour, deceive us ; but teach us experimentally to know and love the cross, and to have the honour of our Lord as the object in which all our desires centre. If this be our privilege, blessed Saviour, we shall not be induced to hesitate in giving up our all to Thee ; for with this blessed possession we have a portion abundant and all-satisfying. O bring us to this result of our reflections and conflicts ; fix our whole hearts in Thee, and grant that our devotion may

be in truth before the ever blessed Spirit, and to the praise of the eternal covenant. In all our associations with each other, make us to guard against the influence that may render us unfaithful to God or man ; and do Thou kindle within us the pure and sacred fire which sanctifies the whole man. O may we be true to our sacred engagements, worship Thee in spirit and in truth, forego all things for Jesus' sake, and visibly display the Lord in His mighty operation upon the regenerate soul. Thus, O God, may we hold on our way, magnify Thee with the free-will offering of our hearts, and be preserved in Christ Jesus unto eternal life. Amen.

PHILIP THE DEACON.

Acts vi. 5 ; viii. 5—13. 26—40 ; xxi. 8, 9.

AMONGST the persons selected from the company of believers, for the discharge of the secular concerns of the flock, we find Philip; who is supposed to be the same as the disciple mentioned in Acts vi. 5. There are some very interesting particulars recorded in the short history of this saint, which it will be profitable for us to consider. It is evident that in the opinion of the church, he, like Stephen, possessed those high qualifications, which they deemed necessary for the proper discharge of the duties connected with their appointment, and that he was a man of honest report, and full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. The gracious dispositions of his soul were soon called into exercise, by a further appointment, which possibly he had not expected; for when the persecution arose wherein Stephen was put to death, he with other scattered Christians, who on that occasion were driven from home, entered upon a ministration of the word as a preacher of Jesus Christ. His first labours of this description were in Samaria, in which region he was greatly blest, for the Lord wrought with his word and gave the witness of miracles to his mission; so that unclean spirits were dispossessed, and the sick were healed. This dispensation occasioned great joy to the Samaritans, and Philip laboured amongst a people evidently prepared by the Lord. His success, and manifest efficacy of the gospel, greatly affected the mind of a certain man named Simon, who was a sorcerer, and had awfully bewitched and infatuated the people of Samaria, persuading them to believe

that he was some great one sent of God, and authorized by the Divine Will to demand their confidence. He, being convinced of the superior virtue of the word preached by Philip, professed to believe; and Philip, giving credit to his profession, baptized him, and admitted him into fellowship with the disciples. Whilst this devoted missionary was thus engaged in the midst of abundant usefulness, it pleased the Lord to separate him from the people, by commanding that he should "arise and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert." To this command he yielded immediate obedience; and, having arrived at the desert, was there made to understand the meaning of this apparently mysterious appointment. He beheld a man riding in his chariot, and apparently absorbed in the study of a book from which he was reading aloud. The Holy Spirit by a well known and supernatural direction commanded Philip to go near and join himself to the chariot; who, running up to the carriage, heard him repeat the interesting testimony from the prophet Isaiah, on which his attention was fixed. This was a sufficient introduction for Philip, who inquired of the reader whether he understood the passage which he had repeated? The answer he received intimated both ignorance and teachableness; and Philip accepted his invitation to ascend into the chariot, where he expounded the prophecy, and preached Jesus. The testimony was blest to the conversion of this chosen vessel, who desiring to receive baptism, and confessing the person of the Son of God, was admitted into the Christian fold: for Philip went down with him to the water and baptized him. Immediately after which Philip was supernaturally taken away from his companion, being conveyed to Azotus, from which place he passed onwards preaching wherever he went, until he came to

Cesarea, where it is supposed he generally resided. We once more read of Philip in Acts xxi. 8, 9. as receiving Paul and his companions, and as having four daughters residing with him, who were all distinguished by the gift of prophecy, and occupied exalted stations in the church. This is the whole of what we possess of any scriptural account of his history or character.

In this character we have a renewed opportunity for admiring the grace of the covenant, and for contemplating the abundance of the salvation, by which the soul and mind of man are capable of being elevated into an existence which is above nature, and which perpetually magnifies the name of the Lord. The Christian church, it appears, was distinguished in the first ages by members, whose irreproachable relative course received the approving witness of all with whom they were connected; and foully as the name of Christian was calumniated by the determined adversaries of truth, the lustre of the Christian character forced conviction, and constrained a tribute, sometimes even from these; and an *honest report* was the accompaniment, not of Stephen's life alone, but of many brethren in the faith, of whom Philip was one. He was likewise distinguished by the manifestation of the pure *source* from whence this excellence proceeded; for he was embued by the Holy Ghost, and partook of that blessed impartation of heavenly wisdom, which is the result of salvation applied to the soul. We can have no doubt that Philip was eminent as a private disciple, for otherwise he would not have been chosen to the service which the Church considered of so much importance: their selection of him proved that he was well known as a man of integrity, and as capable of discharging the trust reposed in him. We may also conclude that he regulated his

domestic concerns with strict attention to Christian simplicity. He seems to have been much blest to his family; for it is probable that his daughters grew up under his nurture well instructed in the truth; and that the Holy Ghost honoured his affectionate labours and counsels, giving him the comfort of beholding his children growing up in devotion to the cross, and called out to be able instructors of others, and fellow-labourers in the cause. In this interesting private scene of duty Philip was engaged as a true and consistent believer, knowing whom he had believed, and loving to commend his blessed name to those around him. The divine counsels had however a work beyond this for which he was preparing, calling him first to the more public office of a deacon, and afterwards to that of an evangelist. The voice of persecution was well interpreted by his soul; he had seen the murder of his beloved brother and companion Stephen, he had felt the extending storm which beat upon the little flock remaining in the wilderness; but this so far from depressing, animated his faith and love; and instead of being silenced or driven into greater privacy by these events, his bosom felt the increasing energy of the heavenly principle, and his life was consecrated to a still more visible and laborious career. In choosing Samaria for the scene of his ministry, he was evidently under divine direction; the *effects* demonstrated that he had chosen what accorded with the mind of the Lord; and probably he would have many precious reflections and feelings, when he remembered how his Master had trod on that ground, and, despised as it was by Israel, had owned it as a region from whence he would gather souls. The extensive fruitfulness, which followed his labours, must have been gratifying to every best affection; and as he seems to have been naturally of a settled and domestic disposition, it

would no doubt have been agreeable here to have fixed his abode, and to have laboured until death. But Philip's highest gratification was found in obeying the purposes of his God ; and therefore he was ready to sacrifice his own wishes, and to exchange a visibly useful scene of action for one where, according to human calculation, he had nothing to expect. This is a demonstration of genuine love and obedience, wherein his own will was subjected to the eternal Wisdom, and where faith could acquiesce with whatever was best in the judgment of the great Head of the church. With joyful alacrity he embraced the opening made for him in the desert, and with that zeal which comprehends the value of *one* soul, he *ran* to the chariot. The hope of gathering this rose in the desert, put animation into body, and mind, and will, and brought him to the interesting spot with ardent expectation of being made a blessing. We can in some measure conceive of the holy glow of pleasure which would be felt in his soul, when he heard the important and comprehensive text from which he was to preach Jesus, and with what delight he would expatiate upon the Lamb of God—tell of his vicarious sufferings—extol his meek endurance—and proclaim his mysterious person ! All this Philip was enabled to do in the power of the Holy Ghost, by whom also the heart of the listening auditor was opened, and Jesus enthroned there. The question which he addressed to the Ethiopian shews us how well he knew the native ignorance and darkness of the sinner's understanding ; and is an evidence also of a judicious mind in himself, for it was suited to bring forth a confession of ignorance, and a request for information ; and according to his expectation he was hereby immediately introduced to his proper work as an evangelist and witness of Jesus ; which he discharged with integrity, affectionately presenting

the object of faith before the sinner's eye, but faithfully requiring a sound confession of that faith ere he administered the rite by which he was acknowledged as a Christian. Having wrought this ordained work, he re-entered upon his more public and general ministry, preaching in towns and villages as he journeyed, and at length returning to Cesarea that he might there again shine as a light before men, and live as a true associate and friend with the persecuted members of Christ. From this limited sketch of the course of Philip we gather, that he was a man of faith, of integrity, of zeal; and that he was graciously delivered from the fear of man; simple and unsuspecting also; domestic—yet capable of filling the most important public offices. He now inherits the everlasting kingdom, and is the companion of Jesus' released ones, who in the world of bliss above glorify and serve their Lord!

It is very refreshing to the soul, in the midst of so many records which lead us to contemplate the more public labour of the Apostles, to turn our thoughts upon the equally interesting work of grace displayed in members of Christ's body occupying less exalted stations; hereby we learn the exceeding excellency of the Spirit's work, who fits all the saints for their several departments, and who equally magnifies his own power and love in every variety of the life of grace which he effects. Christianity is always a lovely object, whether seen in the more dazzling or the comparatively inferior lustre of its character; for although there are in the spiritual heavens stars of greater magnitude and of lesser, the *all* shine in a glory given from the fountain and source of light, and in their appointed orbit exhibit the glory of God. Let us not therefore be so absorbed in our contemplation of such a man as Paul, that we forget the excel-

lence of such an one as Philip ; but give to each the just measure of our estimation, as each the work of the Almighty Spirit. How many estimable believers exist in the world without whom the body would feel itself deprived of great and essential service, and who notwithstanding the little attraction they may have to their fellow men, are precious in the sight of the Lord, and instruments whereby the most beneficial results are experienced to the cause. Let not such consider themselves too insignificant to be objects of peculiar favour, but remember that he, who arranges the state of the family on earth, allots to all their own station, and *in* it loves, approves, sustains, and will bless the faithful efforts of devoted love. Such services as were discharged by Philip are excellent and necessary for the well being of the church, and for the manifestation of her glory before men. Hospitality, family diligence, and devotion, fitness for the discharge of secular business belonging to the church, and a ready heart to embrace the office for the Lord's sake, are dispositions and works that occupy a high rank in the judgment of the Lord. Nor is a *small* measure of grace sufficient for the consistent discharge of these duties. Who does not know, that it requires faith and courage to harbour and support despised saints, especially in times of persecution ? Who will not confess that it calls for patience, zeal, and every Christian energy, perseveringly to labour in domestic scenes for the furtherance of all that is holy ? Who will not feel that in order to persist in managing the temporal concerns of a church or society, or of any funds belonging to the general interest, that it calls for the energy of a *simple* mind, that is independant of the false judgment, censures, suspicions, and ingratitude constantly attending such affairs, and rising out of the selfishness of men ? Surely in all these things there is need of the Holy Ghost

and wisdom. And whosoever has had any experience in such duties will perfectly understand, that if they are maintained consistently in the spirit of Jesus, it is owing to a *large* measure of the grace of the covenant imparted for that end. We may therefore take comfort if we are placed in these situations, and be excited to live in them with gratitude and faith, as serving the Lord Christ. Contented and grateful as we may be for this degree of usefulness in the mystical body, we have however a duty of which every Christian should be aware; we are to look for *increasing* opportunities of serving the interests of the gospel, and along with the diligence due to present obligations, be cultivating the talents which the Lord may bestow, not knowing to what further responsibilities we may be called. It is a delightful existence to be actively employed to-day in what is before us, and ardently preparing for to-morrow in what may further claim our service; asking the gifts of the Holy Ghost, cherishing intimate fellowship with him, and waiting for the opened door that may give us a more extensive field of labour. And it is very possible, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, to combine this contentment with ambition, this humility with further earnest desires for usefulness. These desires may possibly be gratified in a way which we did not anticipate; it may be through trial, persecution, painful change of our abode, and dispensations far from what fleshly reasoning would have proposed. This must be carefully remembered, because some persons, under the idea or pretence of wishing for a larger sphere of usefulness, are secretly wishing rather for a *higher earthly station*. The interests of Christ are in reality *secondary*. This is demonstrated by discontent with the present humble lot; for if the desire were truly spiritual, it would not generate any thing like impatience, vanity, or *postponing*

of labour, because of present inconvenience or privacy. But so infinitely wise is our Lord, that he has connected spiritual honours with earthly tribulations ; thus proving the sincerity of his disciples, and striking at the root of vanity and worldly wisdom. If our affections are rightly influenced, we shall be like Philip in respect of our appointments. And should it please the Lord to send upon us any of those events which, naturally speaking, we call calamitous, in each of these we shall go forth with the determination to testify of our soul's beloved. This may be done in persecutions, in losses, in vicissitudes, in death itself, and never is so suitable as at the time, when we are personally enduring tribulation ; for thus it is that we can practically exhibit the truth and excellency of the faith we recommend. Let us not read these records with an unmeaning assent, or with a mere feeling of acquiescence in what was right and estimable in Philip or others, but let us consider that however peaceably we may now dwell in our home, or seem to be settled in our place of labour, we have no certainty that this will always be our lot ; and we may each be called before we put off our mortal tabernacle to *prove*, whether we have imbibed the same blessed Spirit as animated the first Christians, and are prepared to testify of Jesus, considering the voice of trial whatever it may speak by to us, as sent for an excitement to greater diligence and more laborious faith !

It will be beneficial to us to reflect upon Philip's journey to the desert, and his work there, that we may learn from this example what is meant by obedience and zeal. Obedience will make us subject our own opinions, preference, arrangements, and all that concerns us, to the *divine* will ; and zeal will cause us to appreciate the immortal soul of one sinner, so as to consider it worthy our utmost labour, our whole life of endurance. These

must be our dispositions if we will desire to be true to our discipleship ; and they are *supernatural*, so that we are thrown in dependence upon the supply of the Holy Ghost and of his wisdom, for the possession. Animated by the view of this heavenly existence, O let us prosecute it with ardour and simplicity, and emulate the course of those who thus have lived for their Lord. Let us rejoice in aiding the humble student of the blessed word of God, administer gladly of what we may possess of a greater measure of heavenly light, and count it our dearest privilege to be able to testify to him of the finished salvation of Christ. This will prove a sustaining and joyful inheritance ; it will sweeten our passage through this evil world, and end in the fruition of eternal joy.

PRAYER.

MOST blessed and everlasting God, we meekly beseech Thee to communicate Thyself to us in the dispensation of the Holy Ghost, so as to fill us with the experience of Thy power to elevate the soul and fill it with peace. We have tasted that Thou art gracious ; and, blessed be Thy name, we have an appetite to feed on Thee, knowing and feeling that Thou art the bread of life, the fountain of living waters. O that we may ever possess the lively and invigorating sense of this privilege, and be able to appropriate Thee more and more as our own God and Saviour. Whatever may be Thy divine arrangement of the lot that we possess in this world, we desire to see in it the dispensation of mercy, love, and power, all uniting to consecrate us as vessels to show forth Thy glory. We would not choose for ourselves, O Lord, in any instance, but leave the whole to Thee, knowing Thy infinite wisdom, and having proved Thy un-

changeable grace. Thou doest all things well, and we must be blessed if we are governed by Thee. We ask Thee at this time in much mercy to extend to us the supply of wisdom and strength, which is suitable to our condition; and to enable us for the various duties which devolve upon us in our Christian walk. Make us to understand them, O God, with a spiritual apprehension of the great things which Thou hast promised to such as follow Thee obediently and humbly; and in this discernment of spiritual privileges make us to discharge every avocation, and every claim in life. We are dependent upon Thee for power to do the smallest work acceptable to Thee, and we supplicate for the continuance of a holy recumbent mind; for, O blessed Saviour, herein is the secret of real strength, even in feeling that we have none but what we find in Thee. Shouldst Thou call us to increasing responsibilities, help us cheerfully to embrace them. Shouldst Thou try us by persecutions, enable us to triumph in them. Shouldst Thou require the submission of our own purposes and plans, make us prompt to resign them; and O give us the childlike disposition which obeys and delights in Thy will. Behold our hearts open before Thee, and waiting Thy bountiful gifts. O look on us, Lord, as Thy longing and devoted children, and give us our portion in Thee. And evermore let Thy arms encompass us even as a Father his child, and keep us from all danger, and carry us home to Thy habitation above. All this we humbly ask in Jesus' all-prevailing name. Amen.

STEPHEN.

Acts vi. 5—15 ; vii. 1—60.

A VERY different state of the church opens upon us in this chapter, from that which we have hitherto contemplated. It was greatly increased by multitudes ; and this circumstance occasioned either a real or an apparent neglect, in the administration of the common funds ; of which the Grecian converts complained with a murmuring spirit. Possibly a spirit of earthliness and selfish discontent gave rise to these complaints. It was however sufficient to induce the Apostles to resolve upon surrendering the care of temporal concerns, as more expedient, both for the increase of their own time for spiritual labours, and that the secular interests of the church might be under a more satisfactory arrangement. They therefore proposed that seven men should be chosen out of the flock, who might be deemed suitable for the reception of such a trust ; and this proposal meeting universal approbation, was immediately put in force. *Stephen* was one of the seven appointed to this office ; on whose interesting career, from that period, our reflections are now turned. The requisites, which the first Christians considered indispensable to this service, were an *honest report* before men, and a soul *filled with the Holy Ghost, and wisdom*. This it was believed, these chosen servants of the church eminently possessed ; and *Stephen* gave speedy evidence of the power and extent of his possessions in this respect, he was “ full of faith and power, and did great wonders and miracles among the people.” He administered in his new responsibility with faithfulness, so long

as he continued in it ; but being distinguished by a calling to relative labours of a spiritual nature, and proving a very able advocate of the christian cause, he soon brought upon him the persecuting fury and indignation of the Jews ; who, resolving to cut him off, suborned false witnesses against him, and dragging him before the council, they violently accused him as having blasphemed “ against Moses and against God.” Liberty was however allowed him of speaking in his own defence ; and he addressed the assembly by a statement of historical facts respecting the nation, beginning at the call of Abraham their father, and tracing up principal periods to the time of Solomon ; evidently designing to bring the whole address to conclusion, by leading on the mind to the person of Jesus Christ. He appears to have been interrupted, and forced to the closing charge upon the Jewish nation, by the manifest impatience of the assembly ; and these words being full of severe denunciation upon the people as degenerate, and as living in the perpetration of reprobating sins against the Holy Ghost, the incensed hearers rushed upon him with unrestrained fury, and dragging him forth through the streets, to a place without the city, they stoned him to death. Thus Stephen, the first martyr of the christian church, sealed his testimony of Jesus with his blood, and gave an affecting example to the infant church of what it must expect from confederated adversaries to the cross of the Lord.

The character of Stephen evidently stood high, previously to the occasion in which his name is recorded in the Scriptures. He had been a disciple, it appears, from a much earlier period, and, no doubt, had manifested his sincere devotion to the interests of the faith. He was much honoured by the believers, and seems to have been eminent

also before the rest of men : for the *honest report* spoken of evidently refers to the moral rectitude, for which his character was firmly and universally established. But his was not merely the excellence of moral sentiment ; his soul was the favoured subject of divine grace ; holy affections pervaded the inner man, such as sanctified his actions, rendering them the fruit of the Holy Ghost, and giving an elevation to his relative duties, which constituted them acceptable christian acts. Under this divine unction, he was led into the exercise of vigorous mental powers, having a large measure of wisdom and a sound judgment, so as to render his services in the cause of truth, powerful and convincing. These talents were called into public exercise, by the violence of many disputers, who laboured to overturn the christian doctrine, and against whom Stephen was required to contend. The force and energy of his arguments silenced and confounded his antagonists, “ they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” Convicting and convincing eloquence flowed from his tongue, and carried confusion into the reasonings of natural men. We have a specimen of the style of Stephen’s addresses to the public in his speech before his judges. In this speech we discover plainness and perspicuity, combined with vehemence and ardour,—a judicious arrangement of his subject, with a bold excursive energy of thought,—a wise adoption of matters nationally acceptable and popular, with a forcible personal application of the truths deduced from his statements,—and a fearless simplicity adorning the whole, in which his great object is never out of sight, even the exaltation of Messiah, and the desire of convicting his enemies. The affections of his soul glow in the style, and fill it with fervours of faith, love, and zeal, which surmounting all considerations for personal

safety, taught him to lay even his life prostrate before this cause, and to venture foremost in the battle against the league of earth with hell. In this ardent boldness, he was equally remarkable for the preservation of a spirit unruffled and unmoved by the circumstances around him. His was the vehemence of the eternal Spirit, operating mightily on his own; it was therefore divested of passion, and distinct from all individual interests excepting those of salvation. An Angelic irradiation rested on his countenance, for his enemies beheld his face "as it had been the face of an angel," illumined by the power of the internal light which shone forth from his soul, and supernaturally illumined also (as is most probable) by the reflection of the divine presence, vouchsafed to him as it had been to Moses, in token of the intimacy of the eternal Spirit with his soul. This sacred and holy serenity was displayed amidst confusion, uproar, and violent accusation, and in the immediate prospect of a violent death; for it was evident, the Jews were bent upon his murder. And as he hereby demonstrated the peace and victory of his soul, in all circumstances of this life, so he concluded his course with the sealing evidence of the *substantial* nature of his experience. With his eyes elevated beyond the scene of iniquity around him, he fixed his longing and admiring attention on the vision now opened to his soul. The veil was withdrawn from before the everlasting kingdom of glory, the highest mansions of blessedness were revealed to his sight, the splendid glory of Jehovah shone in its majestic lustre before him, and, in the midst of this enrapturing vision, one blessed object fixed his sight,—it was *Jesus*, that Saviour whose name formed the ground of his hope, and the subject of his testimony, and for the sake of which he was now ready to resign his mortal life. This glorious object of his faith and

love appeared standing at the right hand of God. He beheld him in his authority as the glorified Head of his people, and mediator of the covenant, and in attitude, as if waiting to receive the liberated soul of his faithful servant. From this vision, glory was let down, as it were, not only to irradiate the outward, but to enrapture the inward man, and Stephen, in tones of lofty exultation, proclaimed the wondrous revelation, glorying in the Saviour with rejoicing faith. Nor was this the only testimony, which it was permitted Stephen to give, of that transforming glory which proceeds from Jesus to his people ; his favoured spirit was enabled to evince how much it had already of the mind of Christ, whilst, with the meekness of a dependent sinner, saved by covenant redemption, he kneeled down, he prayed, he committed his departing soul to Jesus, he cried with a loud voice, *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*, thus breathing out his spirit as his Master Jesus did, and then, as one whose head reclined on the breast of LOVE, he fell asleep.

In this character we perceive the triumphs of devotion, integrity, courage, and zeal : blessed examples of the nature of that divine life, which is imparted, when a man is filled “with the Holy Ghost and with faith.” And in the *confession* of faith, which is so fully declared by the dying martyr, we possess a blissful witness to the person of Emmanuel, which should be well observed ; since it not only accords with the whole revelation respecting the godhead of the Man Christ Jesus, but shews us how these truths are interwoven with, and essential to all *experimental* religion, being the only sources whence our life is consistent or our death victorious. It is manifest from histories such as these, that they who honour God, God will honour, and that a consistent disciple,

treading in paths of devotion and integrity, has authorised ground on which to hope for those distinctions which alone he covets. The Spirit gives grace for grace. And although the whole life of faith is the work of the Holy Ghost, to whom is all the glory, yet we see how he is pleased to work by an equitable rule, graciously acknowledging all that his children proffer him in sincerity and truth. It is a great consolation to believers, during this comparatively retired walk of faith, thus to be assured of the divine attention so particularly directed to every word and work, that not the most insignificant or hidden act escapes his notice. And this kind of existence is a blessed preparation for the more public stations which it may be his pleasure to design for his servant. Like Stephen, therefore, we should endeavour to live in the faithfulness of unfeigned devotion, whatever may be our external condition, and strive to maintain what is meant by an *honest report* in all our dealings, as a christian or as a man. It is a constant exhortation from the Lord, that we cherish whatsoever is of good report; and nothing can be more essential to the christian comfort or influence, than this conscious integrity; that with well-doing, he may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and live in the midst of a crooked generation unreprouable. The more visibly these principles and actions proceed from the supernatural existence of the believer, the better. It is always desirable that the glory of every gracious act should be *decidedly* the Lord's; and that christian peculiarity, which consists of sanctification in the Holy Ghost, should be manifest and powerful. A thorough conviction of the desirableness of this privilege, will animate us to seek to be filled with the Holy Ghost, with faith, and with wisdom; for the distinction is not confined to Stephen, but is the inheritance of ransomed souls in every age.

If we are called by the providence of the Lord into stations more exalted or laborious than hitherto, we may rest in the persuasion, that he, who has bid us fill the office, will fill us with sufficiency of grace for that office. Let us not shrink therefore from any duty that comes providentially before us, but cheerfully discharge it with dependence and prayer. We are not in our days gifted with the power of working miracles; but it is possible for believers, in their various stations, so to live by faith, that in the Holy Ghost they shall do wonders before men, that may well be styled miracles of a *spiritual* nature. Efforts, attainments, endurances, and a power of convicting persuasive eloquence will be displayed, so that observers shall not be able to resist the force of this evidence, that the Lord God is with his servant. All this is a privilege and distinction, which our hearts will beat to obtain, in proportion to the degree of our fellowship with Jesus our Master and Lord. The consequent exposure to tribulation, which may ensue, will not be sufficient to deter the soul from the high paths to which it will introduce; yet it is well for us to stand prepared for this result, from the malice of men and rage of devils. Our zeal for Christ will not pass unopposed or unblasphemed: and it will be considered by the powers of darkness a point of interest to cut us off, if it be possible, lest by our testimony the cause of Jesus should thrive. It is in our day equally the purpose of sinners to stand up against the truth, as in any past age; and every manful soldier of the cross will have to encounter disputes, false witnesses, men suborned by Satan, and set on fire by native enmity to Christ, who will misrepresent our doctrines, and accuse us as dangerous to the well-being of men, and opposed to the glory of God. But what are these events to him, whose heart standeth fast, trusting in the Lord. The

experience may in some respects be painful, but it is purifying, and under the exercise there is a proportion of divine support meeting the necessity of the case. The eternal comforter, so far from deserting the soul in its hour of need, will give forth a great measure of his all-sustaining presence ; and, no doubt, we also shall be able to meet our accusers in a holy intrepidity and serenity of soul. We have to watch and pray for this self-possession in the hour of trial, for the Lord has ordained the use of means ; but our simple expectation must arise from the unchangeableness of the Lord himself, who is the inexhaustible source of our strength and peace. We should endeavour after the conviction of our enemies, after the example of Stephen, by calm and reasonable expositions and appeals made to their own understanding and conscience. It is due even to the most perverse disputers, or violent accusers, that we should give the statement of our views with clearness, and lay the truth before them as evidently consistent with the Scriptures, hoping to persuade gainsayers, and to subdue their unreasonableness. But when it appears that resolved enmity to God is fixed in the heart, it equally becomes the believer to adopt language of severity, and to denounce those judgments which God has reserved for the despisers, who shall perish. All this may be done without discomposure to the inward man. It is quite possible, either in the greater or less occasions of this description, for a Christian to feel and speak with *vehemence* without *passion*. Herein Jesus gave us the example, and unto it the Holy Ghost will sanctify us. We may be mistaken in these expressions, by such as are ignorant of the nature of true zeal, or who do not enough discriminate as to the *occasions* which call out the expression, but we must be satisfied with the testimony of the Spirit, and not burden our minds with what man

may judge. Only let us carefully remember that our zeal must maintain its visible purity, by being connected with evident disinterestedness. *Personal* resentment must have nothing to do with our severity against error; we must exhibit the face of an angel, serene, pure, unruffled, beaming with the flame of intense fervour for the glory of the Lord, and with sincerest charity to the souls even of our murderers. The true Saint will possess this inward life, and will manifest it in every scene of human trial or responsibility; and the Lord Jehovah will never fail to render such a witness visibly favoured, by an irradiation shed upon his path, which shall be a lasting memorial of his interest in the Saviour.

The example of Stephen may be directive to us both in life and death. It is ever our interest to direct the eyes of our faith upward, steadfastly looking into heaven. The grace of faith has an energy of a piercing kind, which can penetrate even to the innermost temple, and contemplate the Holy of Holies. Jesus' atonement has rendered the glory of God accessible even to the feeble pilgrims here below; and by the everlasting covenant the redeemed are supplied with powers, by which they are elevated even into the very beams of that glory. It is from this manifestation in Jesus that all the lustre of our conversation in the world first issues, and it is to this that it finally tends. So that our whole life may be in the spirit, as Stephen's last hours were—a looking into heaven, a contemplation of the glory of the Lord, a sight of Jesus in his mediatorial honour and majesty: and our death such as his, in the blissful privilege of committing our departing soul into the bosom of him, whom as God-Man, we have believed, loved, and served; and so sanctifying the last emotions of the heart in this vale of tears, that whether encountering death amidst a

shower of stones, or on a dying pillow, the triumphs of love and charity shall be complete. O may we with heartfelt affection thus embrace the Lord Jesus, and in our final scene be privileged with those who sleep in him, and whose blood-bought souls ascend to his presence for ever.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, Thou Saviour of the lost, and Sanctifier of the vile, to Thee we lift our voice, for Thou alone canst save or help our souls. Earnestly we desire the best blessings of the everlasting covenant, and fain would we travel along that high way of holiness, where Thy eminent saints glorify Thee. Neither will we despair of attainments such as these, since Thou, O Lord, art the free and gracious Giver of every distinction possessed by man. O hearken to the breathings of our souls, and receive them into Thy loving ear; and in pity, Lord, accept our supplication, and give us our lot with the heirs of the promise. We wait for those operations of the Holy Ghost which produce wisdom and faith, and for that indwelling of his life which shall appear in the fruits most honourable to Thee. O do Thou grant that our hopes may be accomplished, so that living or dying we may witness of Thee. In our profession of the gospel, make us solicitous to maintain visible righteousness and integrity in all our dealings; help us to dispose all our worldly concerns, so as to secure an honest report; and let our relative uprightness be the effect of sanctifying grace, and thus be universal and comprehensive, according to Thy will. If Thou art pleased to place us in situations of trust, for the benefit of Thy church, impart also the needful measure of the Spirit to make us faithful. Let us not fail to mingle, even

in our most secular works, a spirit of prayer and communion with Thee; and O may they thus become spiritual services acceptable in Christ. Dispose us likewise to redeem, from all our works of this description, time for the higher occupation of contending earnestly for the faith: and make us able advocates for truth against the disputers and gainsayers of the times. If anointed by Thee, we shall speak with a wisdom and spirit that none shall withstand. O bless us with this ability—bestow on us the utterance and energy of the gift of the Holy Ghost. May we maintain in all these situations an angel-like glory, serenity, and peace; may no outward tumult disturb our inward holy calm; may no threatening dangers interrupt our vision of Thee; but O give us the power of looking up steadfastly into heaven, that within the veil we may see our reconciled and waiting God, and ever rejoice in knowing that Jesus is ready to receive us to the mansions which he has purchased and prepared, where we shall be for ever with the Lord! O do Thou hear and bless us, Almighty Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit, our one eternal God. Amen.

PAUL.

Acts vii. 58. .

IN the last affecting scenes of Stephen, we are introduced to a character, who, in the succeeding history of the church, stands before us in a very prominent light: in the first instance presented in the frightful features of a bloody persecutor—in the after scenes of his conversion, as one of the most eminent servants of the cross. Paul, or as he is called in the beginning of his history, Saul, was one of those who took an active part in the murder of Stephen: probably he was one of the disputers mentioned in chap. vi. 9; for he was of Cilicia. We are informed, that the clothes of the witnesses were laid at his feet, as one who was greatly interested in the decision which had brought that precious saint to martyrdom, and apparently was an expression of homage to him as having obtained a victory over his opponent. And in the viiith chapter, Saul is again mentioned as a principal person in that bloody scene; for it is said, he was “consenting unto his death.” In the defence, which on a future occasion Paul had to make of himself, we possess a statement of his own circumstances, education, and principles, previously to his becoming a Christian; and we are hereby assisted in determining the nature of those passions which actuated his breast against Stephen. He professes that he was a Jew by birth, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, but brought up or educated in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel; a man of high repute for learning, both civil and religious; a ruler, a public teacher, and a pharisee, from whom Paul had received a strict education in all the

customs and laws of Israel, and had imbibed a hot spirit of untempered zeal for the support of his own sentiments and religious views. He was therefore himself a Pharisee, exceedingly zealous, and living after the strictest of those rules of external religion in which that sect prided itself. He also speaks of the rapid advance he made in these acquirements; so that, although very young at the time in which he stood forth as a public character, he exceeded many of his equals in Jewish learning; see Acts xxii. 3; xxvi. 5. Gal. i. 14. Under the power of these principles he looked upon the Christian faith with abhorrence; he considered it a hateful heresy opposed to all his ideas of true religion, and its followers to be despicable, yet proper objects on whom to wreak vengeance, and who ought to be extirpated from the land; and accordingly he volunteered his services as their avowed adversary; and when, upon the death of Stephen, a great persecution arose, he besought the High Priest to constitute him legally a destroyer of this people, by giving him letters authorizing his proceedings against them; and having received this legal instrument, he vehemently prosecuted his way of blood and oppression, acting like a wild beast, with savage ferocity, making havoc of the church, entering into every house, haling men and women and committing them to prison, bringing multitudes bound to Jerusalem to be punished, seeking by torture and terror to compel them to blaspheme, and with exceeding madness persecuting them even to strange cities; see Acts viii. 3; xxii. 4, 5; xxvi. 9—11. Gal. i. 13. It was in the height of this career that the arresting purpose of grace laid hold upon him. As he journeyed with his attendants to Damascus, suddenly a light shone round about him, exceeding the mid-day sun in brightness, and a powerful voice was heard striking the persecutor to the ground, and accusing him

of the crime of fighting against the glorious speaker, and of bringing destruction upon himself by this wild and infatuated course. Neither was he left without full knowledge of the person of him who spake. "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest," were words of dreadful import to him, whose hands were embued in the blood of the saints, and he felt their convicting power. In prostration of spirit he now acknowledges the lordship and authority of the eternal Saviour; and in the voice of dependence asked for his further revelation of what he required. In the first instance, he was commanded to proceed to Damascus, and that there he should be instructed in his future course. The glory of this revelation having occasioned a temporary blindness, Paul was unable to direct his own steps to the city; but being raised from the earth, his attendants led him by the hand. In this state he continued three days and nights, during which time he did neither eat nor drink; Acts ix. 8, 9. It is probable that this period was consecrated in the eternal purpose, for the revelation of those truths of the gospel to the Apostle's mind, of which he had hitherto been ignorant; and possibly this was the occasion referred to, 2 Cor. xii. 1—4, when, being entranced, his spirit was under such a mighty operation of the Holy Ghost, as seemed to divest it of the load of mortality, and to elevate it into the immediate presence of God. Here he received revelations which it was not possible for man fully to declare; and none could lawfully pretend to utter to their extent of grace or glory. In his statement, Acts xxvi. 16—19. he describes some part of the divine revelation as it respected his own individual call; shewing that he was appointed an ambassador to sinful men, especially to the Gentiles; and that he should go forth under the immediate protection and with the witness of Jehovah. From this state

of body and mind, the Lord was pleased to call the Apostle into active service, through the instrumentality of an aged disciple named Ananias, who was directed to hasten to the place where Paul was engaged in prayer, and to greet him as a brother. He was to lay his hands upon him also that he might receive his sight. The rising objections of this believer to an office which appeared dangerous, and inconsistent with the known character of this bloody persecutor, were speedily silenced by the one simple testimony from the Lord, "he is a chosen vessel unto me," and Ananias was obedient to the divine command. No sooner was Paul thus saluted than there fell, as it had been, scales from his eyes ; he was instantly enabled to behold surrounding objects ; and having received the rite of baptism, and partaken of some food, he was strengthened and invigorated both in body and mind, and instantly entered upon his important mission. For some days he remained at Damascus, where he preached the gospel, entering the synagogues with boldness, and proclaiming Jesus to be the Son of God. Here also he associated with the disciples, and was accepted with confidence, and love, by the little flock. But to all others this wonderful change of pursuit and sentiment occasioned surprise. His testimony was also convincing, so as to confound the Jews ; for he proved from the scriptures that Jesus is the very Christ. Wherefore the exasperated adversaries conspired to kill him ; and resolved upon seeking their object by subtlety and stratagem. This design being communicated to the apostle, he was prevailed upon to allow the disciples to consult for his safety ; who took him by night, and let him down in a basket from the wall of the city, from whence he made his way to Jerusalem. Here he immediately attempted to join himself to the disciples ; but they were suspicious of him ; they

doubted his sincerity, and were backward to admit him to their assemblies ; until Barnabas, who was acquainted with the circumstances of his conversion and with his consistent conduct at Damascus, accompanied him to their company, and assured them of his real change of character. He was then joyfully welcomed as a brother, and continued in intimate association with them. Again, however, he became an object of persecution. His powerful reasonings were too convincing, and condemning to the Jews, for them to endure him patiently ; and they plotted against his life. So that the disciples conveyed him away from Jerusalem to Cesarea, and from thence to Tarsus, his own native city. A short suspension of the violence of persecution was at this time granted to the church—it *had rest!* and much spiritual consolation, and increase, was given to the redeemed family, so that they were edified, comforted, and multiplied, Acts ix. 10—31. We are next presented with Paul, in chap. xi. 25. according to what we have seen when considering the life of Barnabas. Being induced by that disciple, he left Tarsus, and accompanied him to Antioch, continuing there a whole year, fulfilling the charge of carrying the contributions of the saints to the church in Judea, returning from Jerusalem again, see chap. xii. 25. and obeying the commission as chap. xiii. 1—4. by which he, with Barnabas, John Mark, Luke, and possibly some other companions, went forth on a mission, which occupied some time, and, as we have seen, exposed them to many perils, but distinguished them as acknowledged witnesses ; see chapters xiii. xiv. xv. as considered in our view of Barnabas. On the occasion when Paul and Barnabas were sent from Antioch to Jerusalem, respecting the question of circumcision, as chap. xv. Paul declares, that he went up by *revelation*, the Lord's divine will being manifested respecting

his appointment to this service, and that he took Titus with him (who was a Gentile convert) not suffering him to be circumcised, and resolutely maintaining that in him the church had an example of Gentile liberty; see Gal. ii. 1—5. It seems that on this occasion some attempt was made to disparage Paul, as if he had not an equally apostolic authority with the rest, and that he was called upon to vindicate his appointment; and that this trial ended in peace, and in the general acknowledgment of Paul, as constituted an apostle to the Gentiles, as verses 6—10. Here also it was that Peter dissembled, and that Paul boldly rebuked him for his inconsistency; 11—15. We have already seen how Barnabas separated from Paul, and that the contention was sharp between them, Acts xv. 39. But we continue the history of the apostle, who taking with him Silas, and having also his faithful Luke as a constant companion, prosecuted his mission. Coming to Derbe and Lystra, he found the churches that had been planted through his ministry, in a prosperous state; and here he was greatly blessed to Timothy a disciple, probably finding him in an infant state of faith, but imparting to him greater knowledge in the gospel, choosing him also as a partner in his journey; and being appointed to communicate to him the gifts of the ministry. To this he refers in his epistles to him, see 1 Tim. i. 2. 2 Tim. i. 5, 6. Intending to direct his services chiefly in the synagogues of the Jews, he circumcised him, that he might have the free access into their assemblies, without which his labours would have been impeded. Being thus prepared, the little company set forward on their way, and passed through the several regions to which the Holy Ghost directed them, following according to his guidance, and surrendering their own arrangements to his infinite and wiser determination. Whilst waiting at Troas for

the heavenly counsel, Paul was favoured with a vision, by which they gathered that it was the will of the Lord to send them into Macedonia, and accordingly they sailed from Troas, and made their way to Philippi the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony. Here they tarried many days, the word of the gospel being particularly blest among the converts. Lydia is mentioned as one of note, who invited the company to her house, and hospitably entertained them. From this place they were driven by the enraged owners of a certain possessed woman, who by a spirit of divination brought her masters much gain. This woman attempted to make the multitude suppose her spirit to be in accordance with that of the apostle and his companions, and, instigated by the devil, followed them with a testimony to their message. But Paul discerning the foul purpose, and grieved by the appearance of any thing like confederacy with such an instrument of Satan, put forth the power which the Holy Ghost had granted him, and in the name of Jesus Christ commanded the evil spirit to come out of her. The word was effectual, and the wretched masters of this miserable creature, instead of rejoicing in her deliverance, were enraged at the loss of their own emolument ; and, rising up in a tumultuous manner, dragged Paul and Silas into the market place before their rulers, accusing them of being Jews who exceedingly troubled their city, bringing in doctrines subversive of their ancient customs and religion. To these accusations the magistrates gave ready credence ; and, ordering them to be beaten with many stripes, thrust them into an inner prison, making their feet fast in the stocks. These sufferings so far from depressing, animated the faith of the sufferers ; and at midnight they sang praises to their God, so that the prisoners heard them. It pleased the Lord also to give a miraculous token of his divine favour

to his afflicted servants, for he sent an earthquake, which shook the foundations of the prison, loosed the prisoners' fetters, and opened the prison doors. By this shock the jailor was awaked out of sleep, and, being filled with terror, was about to destroy himself; when Paul, with a loud voice, bid him rest at peace, for his prisoners were all there. An excitement of a different kind now seized his breast, and springing in before Paul and Silas and falling prostrate before them, he earnestly asked how he might be saved. To this appeal Paul answered by testifying of Jesus. And his conversion being sincere, he instantly espoused the cause of the Christian prisoners. The magistrates being alarmed by the earthquake, sent to the prison with orders to let the apostle and his companion go free; but Paul required a more public concession, and demanded that they should repair their injustice by coming in person, and fetching them out; that so it might be known, that they had been punished unworthily. Paul's reply filled the magistrates with alarm, hearing that these men were Romans. They began to fear that they should be called to an account for their proceedings against them; wherefore they submissively waited upon them, and entreated them quietly to depart from the city. Ere they left Philippi they visited Lydia: saw the brethren and comforted them. From this seed-time an abundant harvest was produced in Philippi, where a flourishing church grew, to the great joy of the apostle; and where strong and faithful affection to him was constantly manifested, as we learn from his epistle to the church; see especially chap. iv.

Paul, leaving Philippi, according to the request of the magistrates, came to Thessalonica, having passed through Amphipolis and Appollonia. Here he followed his usual custom, and entered into the synagogues, where, for three succeeding Sab-

baths, he proved from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. Some converts were given to his testimony ; but the unbelieving Jews stirred up a clamour against him, and assaulted the house where he dwelt. Not finding him there at the time, they drew Jason and certain other brethren before the rulers, loudly charging them with sedition and rebellion ; but the magistrates satisfied themselves with taking security from Jason and his friends to preserve peace, and then dismissed them. The brethren, however, considered it expedient to send Paul and Silas away to Berea, where they preached in the synagogue of the Jews. Here they received great attention ; the Bereans candidly listened, and examined the Scriptures, and many in consequence were persuaded of the truth, and received Jesus. Of these many were high in station and influence. This success did but the more enrage the Jews of Thessalonica, who followed after Paul and Silas, and stirred up the people to oppose them. The brethren therefore again sent away Paul under the conduct of some trusty friends, who conducted him to Athens. Silas and Timothy remained at Berea, but were enjoined by the apostle to follow him as soon as might be possible. At Athens Paul waited their arrival, intending to open his ministry there, when they should have joined him ; but, on perceiving the gross and excessive idolatry of the inhabitants, his spirit was moved within him, and he, unable any longer to refrain, addressed them with open condemnation of their superstitions ; and in the synagogue of the Jews he disputed, reasoned, remonstrated, and taught the several kinds of hearers, who flocked to hear his word. To the Athenians he seemed to be the setter forth of new doctrines, designed to exalt new gods—for thus they interpreted the words, *Jesus* and the *Resurrection*. To this they had no objection :

however multiplied their idols might be, they had a mind that could readily assent to all ; and therefore they inquired of Paul, in this disposition, what were the particular tenets he wished to propose ? Others utterly despised him, yet they were willing to entertain themselves with discussions, or to pass the hours in a trifling spirit, hearkening to something which indulged their taste for novelty. Being brought to the Areopagus, he was desired to explain to them what his opinions were ? And Paul seized the favourable opportunity for preaching the eternal only God—the nature of the future world, and the coming judgment ; exhorting his hearers to repent and renounce their idols, and to turn to the everlasting Saviour. This discourse awakened mockery and contempt in some ; others said we will hear thee again of this matter. A *few* names were given, who savingly apprehended the revelation, and cleaved unto the apostle. But it was an unfavourable region, and Paul did not tarry there long. Leaving Athens he came to Corinth—a licentious city, but a region where greater prosperity was given to the seed of the gospel. In this city he met with Aquila and Priscilla, who had lately come from Italy, being banished Rome by the order of Claudius respecting the Jews. These were Christians, and being of the same occupation as that in which Paul had been instructed, he abode with them, and they wrought together. Every Sabbath, however, he entered the synagogue and preached, persuading both Jews and Greeks in the faith of Jesus. Here he was joined by Silas and Timothy, and with increasing energy exhorted the Jews to believe in Jesus as Messiah ; but finding them fixed in their enmity, and open in their blasphemy, he resolved to quit them ; and, shaking his raiment, he said, “Your blood be upon your own heads ; I am clean ; from henceforth I will go to the Gentiles.”

He then retired to a private house, belonging to a convert named Justus, who lived near to the synagogue. Paul's witness, however, was not entirely without effect amongst the Jews—Crispus especially, the chief ruler, and all his house, received the word; and amongst the Corinthians many were converted and baptized; so that the spirit of the apostle was cheered, and he had cause for gratitude and praise. His faithful Lord also gave him the comfort of an assuring vision, exhorting him not to fear, but resolutely to speak, and promising to be with him as a defence from all opposers—for there were many in that city—of the precious souls to whom the purpose of grace would be revealed through his ministry. Blest by these divine assurances, Paul continued in Corinth a year and six months, teaching the word of God. Attempts were made to prevent his preaching, but Gallio being deputy-governor in Achaia, and indisposed to persecution, the complaints and violence of the enemies of Christians were not attended to. At length he left Corinth, and sailed into Syria, accompanied by his friends; Aquila and Priscilla also joined the company. Having a vow to perform, into which he had entered on some occasion, he tarried at Cenchrea until it was accomplished; and, leaving his two last-mentioned friends at Ephesus, whither he advanced from Cenchrea, he passed on to Jerusalem, purposing to observe the Passover there, as a favourable opportunity for his great and blissful mission. See Acts, chapters xvii. xviii.

Having accomplished what he designed, Paul returned to Ephesus, where he found certain disciples, who seem to have resided there ever since the time of John's baptism, and to have remained in ignorance of some of the great peculiarities of the gospel. These the apostle explained, especially the necessity of being baptized into the name of

Jesus Christ, and of receiving the more abundant operations of the Holy Ghost, of whose personal existence and relative grace they were entirely ignorant. These teachably accepted the apostle's instructions, and, being baptized, received the Holy Ghost in the plenitude of gifts as well as grace, so that they spake with tongues and prophesied. In Ephesus Paul was greatly blest to the conversion of souls, although opposed by many hardened offenders and prejudiced Jews ; but he separated the disciples from these, and, occupying the school of one Tyrannus, he there continued to teach for the space of two years, so that the testimony of Jesus sounded out from thence to a wide region, addressing itself both to Jews and Greeks, the Lord also confirming the testimony by the sign of miracles. This circumstance gave occasion to some vagabond Jews, who lived by imposition and diabolical arts, to adopt the name of Jesus, supposing it would prove a source of greater gain to them ; but their blasphemy was reproved and exposed by a peculiar method ; for the evil spirit, over whom they had undertaken to invoke the name of Christ, refused to admit their pretensions, and, leaping upon them, overcame them, so that they fled away naked and wounded ; at the same time, the evil spirit was constrained to confess, " Jesus I know, and Paul I know." This striking event gave a powerful impression to the apostle's word, so that fear fell on men, and the name of Jesus was magnified ; whilst many who had lived by the same diabolical practices as those of the men who had been thus exposed, were so deeply convicted of guilt, that they made a public confession of their sin, exposed their own impositions, and brought their books together, and burned them before all men ; " so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed ! " During this time Paul was purposing to go again to Jerusalem, and accord-

ingly made his arrangements, sending Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia. He was however delayed in Ephesus longer than he expected, by the sudden uproar that was stirred up by Demetrius a silversmith, who was by trade a maker of silver shrines for the heathen goddess Diana. The spread of the gospel was destructive to his trade, and he resolved upon making a stand against it. For which purpose he called together the craftsmen and men of like occupation with himself, and exhorted them to resist the gospel, since otherwise their wealth must end. By his inflammatory speeches he put the city into the utmost confusion, all the inhabitants were roused by the cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians;" and some of Paul's companions being caught, they were violently hurried to the theatre. Paul's ardent spirit could not endure that his friends should be thus exposed whilst he remained in comparative safety, and, rushing forward, he would have thrown himself in amongst the multitude, to plead the glorious cause; but the disciples would not suffer him, and his friends earnestly dissuaded him from what they deemed a rash and imprudent step. It appeared more prudent to put forward Alexander, who might be less obnoxious, and be heard with more forbearance; and this attempt was made; but when the multitude discovered that he was a Jew, they vociferated again, in tones which drowned the voice of Alexander, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." No prospect appeared of quelling this tumult by reasoning; but the town-clerk appearing, they were obliged to give him audience. He endeavoured to assuage the tempest of popular fury that had been stirred up, by admitting their claim for the honour of Diana, and reminding them that it would be their wisdom to consult for their own security by immediately dispersing, since otherwise they were liable to the law which they

violated by such disorders; and that the proper way of proceeding was, for Demetrius, if he had any thing against any man, to appeal to the law, which was open, and which would legally determine his cause. Having thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly. Chap. xix.

Chap. xx. When this uproar in Ephesus ceased, Paul embraced the disciples, and affectionately bid them farewell, departing for Macedonia. And passing through his intended circuit, he diligently exhorted the different churches, coming at length into Greece, where he abode three months. And discovering a plot formed by the Jews against his life, he prudently changed his course, and returning through Macedonia, was attended by many brethren to Asia. Here some of them left Paul, and went before to Troas, waiting for him there, where he joined them in five days, and tarried seven days in Troas, testifying of Jesus. On the seventh day of his continuance there, being about to depart on the morrow, he addressed the believers who were assembled together to break bread, and prolonged his speech even until midnight; when an affecting circumstance interrupted the meeting. A young man who sat in an elevated place, being overcome by fatigue, fell asleep, and falling down from his seat was taken up dead; but Paul being inspired by the Spirit, was immediately able to testify that he should be restored, and exhorted the company to dismiss their trouble; descending from the place where he had been delivering his address, he embraced the lifeless body, and God was pleased to honour his servant by miraculously restoring the young man to life, to the great joy of his friends. After this work of divine power, the company returned to their interesting service; they celebrated the Lord's Supper, and after lengthened and holy communion, at break of day they separated, and Paul departed. His associates were

prevailed upon at this time to take shipping, and sail before him to Assos, where he appointed them to take him up, purposing to travel there alone on foot; from thence they all proceeded to Miletus, passing by Ephesus at this time, lest they should be too long detained from Jerusalem, where Paul desired to be the day of Pentecost. From Miletus however he sent to Ephesus, desiring the elders of that church to come to him, whom he addressed, in the most solemn and affectionate manner, with exhortations which respected both their personal and ministerial interests, expressing also his perfect knowledge of the afflictions awaiting him, and the steadfastness of his faith in this prospect. He likewise showed them that this interview was the last he should have with them in this world, that he now addressed them with a last and parting counsel, and called upon them to watch vigilantly against the many evils they would have to encounter, especially such as would arise out of their own flock; and to walk in those steps which he had constantly urged upon them, and had exemplified in his own life. Having closed this address, he kneeled down and prayed with them all; and they fell on Paul's neck and kissed him and wept sore, being most afflicted at the words which he had spoken, respecting his final farewell to them. With the utmost affection they accompanied him to the ship; and Paul and his companions set sail and came by a regular course to Patara; here finding a vessel that was bound to the place of their destination, they went on board, and in consequence landed at Tyre where the ship was to unlade her burden. And finding disciples there, they tarried amongst them, giving and receiving much edification and comfort; and re-entering the ship amidst the affectionate expression of the Christians who accompanied them to the shore, where they all kneeled down and prayed, so they parted, commit-

ting each other to the Lord. From thence the Apostle with his friends sailed and came to Ptolemais, staying one day with the brethren there ; and thence passing to Cesarea, they entered the house of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven deacons chosen as Acts vi. 5, where they remained many days. During this visit, there arrived from Judea a certain Prophet named Agabus, who testified, by an expressive sign, what bonds and sufferings awaited Paul, who was in consequence entreated by the disciples not to go up to Jerusalem ; but he remained inflexible on this point, declaring his readiness both to be bound and to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus ; and when they perceived that his purpose was fixed, they desisted from their entreaties, and yielded the direction of his affairs to the will of the Lord. The little band of believers now advanced to Jerusalem, carrying with them an increase of faithful friends from Cesarea, with an old disciple also, at whose house in Jerusalem they were to lodge. At Jerusalem they were greeted with much joy by the brethren. And it was at this time that James, as we have seen in his life, advised Paul to an act of conformity with Jewish prejudices ; which, instead of conciliating the Jews, exposed him to the most furious assault, from which he was forcibly rescued by the chief captain, after having received many blows and insults from the mob. The captain supposed him to be a notorious offender, an Egyptian, who had occasioned a violent uproar on a former occasion at the head of a band of murderers, and ordered him to be bound with two chains ; but Paul with great temper and fervent zeal explained to the captain that he was a Jew, and a man of no mean repute ; and entreated liberty, ere he was conveyed away, to address the people from the stairs. Having received his permission, he beckoned with his hand to the multitude, and when silence was

made he spoke to them in the Hebrew tongue. His defence consisted of a full statement of his birth, nation, religious views, &c. with his first career of blood as a persecutor, his after conversion to the faith of Jesus by the divine revelation, his labours, and the rejection of his mission by the Jews, and his commission from the Lord to depart to the Gentiles. Until this part of his discourse, the audience gave a mute attention to his words ; but at the mention of the *Gentiles*, their passions burst out into a new flame, and they “cried out, Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live.” The chief captain, unable to ascertain for what reason the Jews were so violent against Paul, determined to extort some confession from him of his supposed crimes, and gave orders that he should be examined by scourging ; but as the soldiers were binding him with thongs, Paul inquired if they considered it a lawful act to bind a man that was a Roman, and that had neither been tried nor condemned ? These words were reported by the Centurion to the chief captain, with a caution, that he plunged not himself into difficulties by this rash procedure ; who, having interrogated Paul upon his privilege, and being satisfied of the truth of his pretensions, was not without fear, for having gone thus far against his person ; his examiners also departed from him, having loosed him from his bonds. The next day he required that the chief priests and all the council should appear, and before him give an account of their proceedings ; and placing Paul before them, he first had liberty to speak. Earnestly beholding the assembly, he protested in the opening of his speech that unto that day he had lived in all good conscience before God. A declaration, which seeming to throw censure upon the conduct of his enemies the Jews, moved the high priest to passionate resentment, and he commanded them that

stood by to smite him on the cheek. Indignation at this injustice fired the breast of Paul, who with much warmth retorted, saying, "God shall smite thee thou whited wall, for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" The hearers without attending to the injustice of the deed rebuked him as a reviler of God's high priest; to which Paul meekly replied by an apology, declaring his ignorance that he was the high priest, for otherwise he would not have trespassed the law prohibiting the words of reproach against the ruler. It was now evident to the Apostle that no regular account of his own conversion, nor any clearest testimony of the gospel, would prevail with the counsel before whom he stood. Perceiving that they were composed of a mixed company of Pharisees and Sadducees, he judged it most suitable to pass directly to the great question of the resurrection of the dead; and with a loud voice declared, that for this hope he was now called in question. According to his expectation the council was now thrown into a scene of debate. The Pharisees instantly espousing his cause, so far as to admit the propriety of attending to him, if indeed a spirit or angel had spoken to him, lest they should be found fighting against God. And the Sadducees being still more incensed, for they denied the existence both of angels and spirits, and of the resurrection. The chief captain, fearing that in this discussion Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to take him by force from among them, and bring him into the castle. The night following, Paul was comforted by a visit from his Lord, who appeared unto him, and graciously bid him be of good cheer; he acknowledged the testimony he had so boldly given of his name in Jerusalem, and assured him he should do so also in Rome. The returning day found his enemies more exasperated than ever;

and forty Jews met together binding themselves under a solemn curse neither to eat or drink until they had killed him; having thus pledged themselves, they waited upon the chief priests and elders, communicating what they had done, and inviting them to forward their design by demanding another examination of Paul, and promising that ere he reached their council they would fall upon and slay him. This conspiracy being discovered by Paul's nephew, he without hesitation entered into the castle and communicated it to Paul, who sent him by the centurion to the captain, to whom he made a full discovery of the plot, entreating him not to consent to the Jews. The captain acted promptly on the occasion, and having prepared a band of armed men for the protection of the prisoner, he despatched him in the third hour of the night from Jerusalem to Cesarea to the governor Felix, at the same time writing an account of the case of Paul, but professing that he had rescued him *being a Roman*. Thus Paul was conducted as far as Antipatris, where he was left to the care of the horsemen, who conveyed him in safety to Cesarea and brought him before Felix, who commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall until his accusers should arrive. After five days the High Priest and elders and a certain orator named Tertullus descended to Cesarea, and their accusation was delivered against Paul by the mouth of Tertullus, who sought to pave his way to success by flattery and adulation addressed to Felix. He according to the usual method of proceeding against Christians, charged Paul with sedition, and represented him as a pestilent fellow, being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes; that he had also profaned their temple, and sought to subvert their law, stating also that the chief captain had intruded on their prerogative, and taken him with great violence out of their

hands. Felix now beckoned to Paul to answer his accusers ; to which he cheerfully yielded obedience. Knowing that Felix, being acquainted with Jewish customs, would be better able to discriminate in this case than the captain had been, he therefore with great simplicity related the real circumstance in which the Jews had found him ; but as it respected his faith, this he confessed to be after what they called heresy, but which he believed as the fulfilment of the promise made to their fathers, and according to which faith he unceasingly exercised himself to live conscientiously. Felix, having an understanding of the ground upon which these differences existed, was satisfied that it was no question to be hastily determined against Paul ; he therefore broke up the examination, by postponing it until the chief captain might appear, and give his account of the circumstances which had occurred under his observation. Paul was committed to the care of a centurion, but with orders to let him have a certain degree of liberty, and free intercourse with his friends. Felix appears to have left Cesarea for a short season, but returning with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard from him the proclamation of the faith of Jesus in terms which struck to his heart and conscience ; for whilst he reasoned upon righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled. He was however unwilling to admit the conviction, and dismissed the Apostle, promising at a convenient season to call for him again. This he seems frequently to have done, hoping also that money would be given as a bribe for his life ; but after two years had elapsed, Felix being removed, and Festus coming in his place, Paul was left still in bonds, in order, as Felix hoped, to render himself popular with the Jews. Festus, being come into the province, after three days passed from Cesarea to Jerusalem, where the Jews immediately

assailed him on the case of Paul, entreating that he might be sent to Jerusalem and judged there ; determining to lay wait for him in the way and kill him. He however refused their request, and required if there were any wickedness in the man, that his accusers should go to Cesarea where he would shortly meet them. To this they were obliged to consent, or to drop the prosecution. Therefore attending Festus on his return, Paul was commanded to be brought forth. His trial was on this occasion conducted much in the same way as in the previous scene of accusation and falsehood ; and Festus willing to oblige the Jews, and perceiving that he was not himself capable of discriminating well in the question, inquired of Paul if he were willing to go to Jerusalem and be judged there ; whereupon he instantly appealed to his privilege as a Roman, and demanded that he should stand at Cæsar's bar ; for to the Jews he had done no wrong as Festus very well knew. To this appeal Festus yielded his assent, and Paul remained a prisoner. He was however anxious to have some certain statement to make of his cause, since it seemed unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not at the same time to specify his offence. And at this season, Agrippa and Bernice coming to Cesarea to congratulate Festus on his promotion, he considered it a favourable opportunity for investigating the case of Paul. Accordingly he was brought forth, and placed before an assembly of hearers, and requested to speak for himself ; a liberty which he gladly embraced, since it afforded him an occasion for witnessing of his beloved Lord. This he did by relating his history and past experience, and the revelation of Jesus which had been given to him, with his consequent labours in his blessed name. To Festus these appeared monstrous delusions of the imagination, and he could not restrain a burst of expression by which his ignorance and

surprise were equally betrayed; he accused Paul of being mad, and has having deranged his intellect by too much study; but the Apostle replied in dignified calmness, that he was not mad, that his words were truth and soberness, for a witness of which he could appeal to king Agrippa himself, to whom these truths were very well known. At the same time with a pointed personal address, he turned immediately upon the king with a convicting energy of manner, and a fearless appeal to his sentiments respecting the prophets—he knew that he believed, and that the Christian faith was no fable before his illuminated mind. The force of these words was felt by Agrippa's conscience, whose lips also confessed an *almost* persuasion of the desirableness of becoming a Christian; to which the Apostle added his hearty desire that these impressions might be abiding, and lead to a devotion *altogether* such as became the subject of discussion. The assembly however was broken up without further debate, excepting that it was agreed, Paul had done nothing worthy of death or of bonds, and might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to Cæsar. He must however be sent to Rome, and immediately after this examination he was put on board a ship under the guard of a centurion with certain other prisoners, and with a few of Paul's friends, and they sailed for Italy. In this passage the winds were contrary, and great danger threatened them, which, contrary to the advice of Paul, the captain resolved to risk, and in consequence they encountered a tremendous storm, and the wreck of the vessel. In the midst of these perils the Lord appeared to Paul, exhorting him to be of good comfort, and promising to abide with him through the whole of what awaited him. And we behold him through these terrors of the deep brought with the whole of the ship's company, whose lives were preserved on his account, to the

shore of Melita, to which they escaped in various perilous forms, some swimming through the stormy waves, others floating to shore on boards and broken pieces of the ship. The island on which they were cast was inhabited by barbarians, but they treated the shipwrecked company with great kindness. Here Paul was called out to demonstrate his mission ; he attracted the attention of the barbarians from the circumstance of a viper from the midst of the wood they had gathered for a fire, coming forth and fastening upon his hand ; the natives knew that this bite was mortal, and immediately concluded that Paul was a murderer, who was pursued by judgment, and expected to see him fall down dead ; but when on the contrary he shook the beast off, and felt no harm, they changed their opinion, and said that he was a god. A chief man of the island, receiving the mariners courteously into his own house, gave a further demonstration of Paul's distinction as God's servant ; for he healed him of a distemper under which he was suffering ; and many others in the island, hearing of these mercies, solicited and received the same help. As the time of the delay which was experienced at this island was three whole months, abundant opportunity was afforded for preaching the gospel ; and it is evident, that so greatly were the natives impressed by all which had been displayed and wrought amongst them, that their affections were warmly interested in the company. The winter being passed, they again set sail in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle ; and Paul was permitted by Julius the centurion to refresh his spirit with communion amongst the brethren at the places where they touched. At length reaching the place of their appointment, they were delivered by the centurion into the keeping of the captain of the guard ; but Paul was privileged by being separated from other

prisoners, dwelling in a distinct prison under the care of a soldier. The first act of a public kind, in which Paul engaged himself, was to send for some of his nation, and explain to them that he had not appealed to Cæsar from any intention of accusing his own people, but that they had compelled him to this act for self-preservation, having treated him injuriously. They assured him that no information respecting these things had been sent to them from Jerusalem; but they were desirous to hear what he had to say respecting the sect of Christians, since it was every where spoken against. To this, Paul's heart yielded a glad assent; and having appointed a day, there came many unto him to his lodging, and he expounded the faith to them, from the law and the prophets. The effect was such as usually took place amongst the Jews; it gave rise to much disputation and reasoning among themselves. Some believed, but others rejected the word. To the perverse and unbelieving he spoke in terms of utmost severity, showing them how they were accomplishing in themselves the awfully judicial sentence spoken of old through Isaiah, and that their nation would be given up to this blindness, and the Gentiles inherit their privileges. But to the teachable, Paul had a more blessed calling, and was engaged during two whole years in receiving all who came to him, preaching to them the kingdom of God, and teaching them things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him. During these two years, it is evident that Paul possessed a great degree of liberty; and it is generally supposed, that at the expiration of that term he was allowed his entire freedom; but that this continued only a short period; for that Nero being exasperated at his success in winning converts to the faith, especially in his own palace, caused him to be apprehended and put to death, as is generally supposed, by

beheading him. Thus was the interesting and laborious course of Paul concluded ; who having fought the good fight, received the prize for which he ardently contended ; being made conformable to his Lord in death, and through the sufferings of the last mortal stroke bounding into that presence where all his richest possessions were laid up.

We have now to review these particulars. Our object is to obtain clear views of the Apostle's character, and to render them profitable by a practical application of the several parts. This may be done by gathering out of the history contained in the Acts, what particularly belongs to character, and by advancing to what may be selected from his Epistles which relates to his own experience. And since we have not a record of any disciple so extensive, or fraught with such a rich variety of exercises in the heavenly life, we should enter upon this part of the history with a supplicating spirit, asking the divine influence of the Holy Ghost, and looking to the internal teachings which he only can give.

We must in the first place examine the character of Paul as a *natural* man. Herein there were many striking features, and some which were calculated to ensure admiration from men of his own station, sect, or disposition. That he was possessed of great natural strength of mind, is conspicuous in the whole history ; and these abilities seem early to have developed themselves. As a scholar, he was studious, diligent, and capable of making great proficiency in the learning of that age ; for which he had every advantage from his able instructor Gamaliel. His reasoning powers were strong, and he manifestly put them *forth* in a way which would be most popular, and acceptable to those amongst whom he was appointed to move. In addition to these intellectual attainments, he

was exemplary in his moral conduct, and zealous in his religious profession. Of this he frequently speaks, declaring that he had "lived in all good conscience before God until this day," that after the strictest sect he lived a Pharisee, that he was zealous toward God, that as touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless, and that if any man might be supposed authorised to have confidence in the flesh, he had more; see Phil. iii. 4—6. And even in his deep humiliation for the crime of persecuting the church, he declares he did it ignorantly, that is, he uprightly imagined he was doing God service, although he awfully misconceived the right way. It appears that Paul was chiefly ambitious for *religious* honour; and, notwithstanding the carnal and corrupt state of his mind and affections, he was conscientious; observing whatever ceremony or institution was considered essential to religion, and embracing also in his possession of the oracles of God, the purest of the tenets professed by the different sects in his nation; holding to the promise of a Messiah, to the hope of a resurrection from the dead, and to the great realities of eternity. We must therefore admit that Paul, as a natural man, had some human virtues and excellencies; he was honest, ardent, laborious, moral, zealous, and in his career acted according to the dictates of his conscience in the sight of God. Beholding him in this light, we should be disposed to give him our high estimation; yet when we look to the root and principle from which all this natural integrity and fervour proceeded, or examine the accompaniments by which his expression of these principles was exhibited, we are checked in our tribute; the beautiful blossoms we looked upon with admiration drop off, and we see one on whom there rests the evident blight and blast, by which all that is natural in man, is visibly under a curse. In Paul there was

the prevalence of an ignorant, proud, and bigotted mind. Notwithstanding the knowledge of rites and ceremonies, and of the *letter* of the law, he was destitute of the spiritual discernment which is requisite to real knowledge; and with the prophets ever before him as his study, and the ceremonial law continually in his view as observed by him day after day, he could not discern the substance of these things in Jesus of Nazareth; he thought that he was called upon to take up arms against this Holy One, and knew not Messiah in this lowly form. In the midst of his zeal, he was in fact a blasphemer of the living God, hurried on by a blind and intemperate passion, to persecute those very truths most honourable and dear to Jehovah. In the height of his boasted and external morality, he was injurious, devoid of mercy, a pitiless murderer, and without any discrimination or judgment, madly bent upon gratifying his own violence, making no distinction of age, sex, or character, but destroying whatever or whoever bore the remotest relation to Jesus. There is something very remarkable in the terms by which his persecuting spirit is described; *slaughter*, *breathing* out threatenings, *compelling* to blaspheme, *exceedingly* mad, entering *every* house; and all this rendered still more deliberately cruel, because he was not thrown into the temptation of thus deporting himself by any thing in his providential lot or station, but acted as a volunteer, uncalled, unexcited by any other impulse, but what arose from positive enmity to Christ. We may perceive these monstrous traits, by consulting Acts ix. 1, 2 : xxii. 4, 5 : xxvi. 9—11. Gal. i. 13. Phil. iii. 6. 1 Tim. i. 13. And we shall hereby be convinced, that notwithstanding the mental elevation, moral rectitude, and religious zeal for which Paul, as a natural man, was an object of admiration, he was absolutely, and in the most

fearful extent, under the complete dominion of Satan and sin, exemplifying in his own character the signification of his name, *Saul a Sepulchre*.

We have had the opportunity of perceiving, in the past history, how mysteriously and sovereignly the purpose of God's electing love was exhibited towards this man, who, notwithstanding his awful course of persecution, was himself a vessel of mercy, reserved to become one of that very flock whose blood he had wasted, and to seal, by the surrender of his own life to the murderer, his witness of that Jesus whom he had madly fought against. When struck to the earth by the Light and Voice that met him on his way, a prostration of the *inner* man was effected. At once, amazed and convicted, he fell before the name of his injured Saviour; and now, with a full flood of light poured in upon his soul, he contemplated the infatuation of his desperate mind and blood-stained path with horror, yet not with despair: the light that was given contained in it a healing virtue also, and *enmity* could not now exist to him whose real nature and person were revealed. The language of submission and prayer therefore instantly succeeded to his blasphemy, and his future paths were cast upon Jesus for direction: the Holy Ghost had now effectually entered his soul, and there established Jesus as Lord. In the merciful fulfilment of his desire for further instruction, the same Spirit invincibly wrought along with the revelation, giving that constraining operation by which all the natural ardor, zeal, and vehemence of his character were sanctified to the service of the cross. Of this internal influence the apostle speaks. He shews the Galatians that he addressed them as an *apostle*—as one who had received his commission from the Lord Jesus, even as the other apostles had received theirs: that the gospel was not revealed to him through man, but immediately

from God. Gal. i. 1, 11, 12. agreeing with I Cor. xv. 3—8; and that this revelation was attended with an unction which at once determined and settled his choice. Immediately he consulted not with flesh and blood, he took no counsel from men, he hearkened not to any reasonings of his nature, but promptly, and as one perfectly understanding the high authority which constituted him an apostle, he preached the faith which once he destroyed. Gal. i. 15, 16, 23. Thus he was mightily seized or apprehended by the omnipotent arm of the Lord, triumphantly borne from the dark kingdom of Satan, loosed from the chains by which he had been held captive, and invested with a vigour of new principle, great in its measure and victorious in its course, causing him to run a splendid wondrous race, and to exhibit Christ's matchless conquests before the eyes of an astonished world. Pains and distresses of heart no doubt were deeply experienced by the apostle, in the sense of his iniquity and terrible guilt. To the past scenes of his ignorance he frequently reverts in his discourses, always taking the retrospect of his life, when an alien from Christ, with deepest self-aborrence, as the chief of sinners. These views were however possessed through the beams of a light issuing from Calvary, and shedding even in their clearest glory the testimony of forgiveness and peace. Paul could triumph in the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of his Redeemer, even when groaning under the sense of his misery as a sinner. He had now learnt what it is to *pray*: former offerings had been many and laborious, which he brought as a Pharisee before God; but now, for the first time, he understood and exercised the privilege of opening the heart to him, who in a covenant established by blood, could now be a prayer-hearing God, accepting the sighs of the penitent and the devotion of faith. In this dispo-

sition the apostle could find that rest to his soul which he pointed out to others ; and with the load of his now discovered sin and need, he could come to the bosom of eternal love in an infinite Saviour. Love was now kindled in his own breast, and in his measure he could return the affection of his Lord. This Jesus knew, for from him the blessing came, and therefore, young as the apostle was as a disciple, he was immediately shewn how great things he must *suffer* for the Lord. With this revelation, Paul was made to comprehend also the *spiritual* glory in which they would result ; and so ardently and sincerely did his heart respond to the appointment, that ever afterwards we find him consistently and cheerfully devoted to the divine will. He entered his new existence conformably with the Christian institution, receiving baptism as a divine ordinance, as a sacred channel through which further spiritual blessings might be received, and as a public testimony to his acceptance of Christ Jesus as the only Redeemer. The practical effect of this inward change was decisive. Disciples were henceforth his chosen and loved companions—the synagogues were now entered as a *preacher of Jesus* in bold and intrepid faith, in disinterested ardent zeal, growing in spiritual strength and energy, and prospering in these demonstrations of his love. Under the baptism of the Holy Ghost, his spirit retained all its native ardour, combined with holiness and spiritual regulation, tempered by a just value for his life as consecrated to the Lord's service, and therefore to be cherished by prudence even whilst willingly exposed to peril. But his sufferings were not bounded by such as arose from the *world* : he had to pass through the painful exercise of being suspected by brethren who, in the first period of his conversion, were doubtful of him ; and in many after instances to receive from his own children in the faith suspicion,

disrespect, desertion, and all those evils which spring from the ingratitude and fickleness of human hearts. These he was enabled to endure with meekness and believing acquiescence. Experience of his own heart taught him compassion and forbearance towards others; and he could with unfeigned affection overcome their evil with good. Not that the apostle in all instances observed the expression of gentleness. His passions, although regulated so as to flow in an unruffled stream, amidst all kinds of personal injuries, were, on some occasions, raised high like the swellings of the sea; when Jehovah's honour was attacked—when vile hypocrisy sought to cloak itself before him—when the simplicity of the gospel was endangered—when sinners wilfully blasphemed the sacred name of Jesus,—the impassioned soul of Paul gave powerful evidence of its ability to feel, and the severity with which it could denounce the eternal vengeance, or testify against transgression. We have constant examples of this in history, especially in the case of Elymas the sorcerer, and of the false teachers who sought to corrupt the Galatian church. See Acts xiii. 8—11. Gal. i. 8, 9. So also a spirit of holy indignation wrought in his breast, when at Lystra the ignorant multitude attempted to offer divine honours to him and to his companion; proving that with impartiality he was ready, whatever the occasion might be, to witness for God as the only and the blessed Jehovah, and that his bosom glowed with sacred zeal for the glory of him whom he was privileged to serve. No human malice or satanic fury were able to quench this supernatural flame, which, being once kindled on the altar of his heart by the Holy Ghost, prevailed, gradually purifying his affections more and more, and seeming, in his character and labours, to give us a remarkable exemplification of the meaning of the passage, He maketh "his ministers a flame

of fire." In those situations wherein Paul was required to plead for the great peculiarities of the gospel, he shines forth with particular lustre. He was raised up as a bulwark to the truth of the gospel, even amongst its friends ; for being singularly endowed with power of judgment, discernment, intrepidity, and independence of the creature, he was well suited to detect the first deviations from the right rule, and to declare what he detected. This we find him evincing in the general council called at Jerusalem, and in all matters of a more private kind belonging to the same question. Yet with this extraordinary firmness uniting great candour and humility—willingly consulting with others for general good—ready to be advised by his brethren—humbly adopting all things expedient in order to further the gospel—and in the direction of his own work obediently waiting for the call, never presuming to go before the pillar and cloud, but rejoicing to follow as the Spirit led. This disposition made him satisfied to labour in the *smallest* assemblies, amongst persons most obscure and despised, for individuals, with an equal earnestness and zeal as when engaged in the largest concourse of people. To him the approving witness of his Lord was a *sufficient* portion ; and in consequence, the love of *popularity* was far from him ; and all testimonies in his favour, which were not manifestly *holy*, were abhorred and resisted by his soul. It was this simplicity which opened a source of such never-failing enjoyment to his spirit, so that in bonds, imprisonments, and stripes, his mind and heart were peaceful and glad in the Lord. External circumstances did not interrupt the flow of these delights, for he derived them from the bosom of his God, and could say, "All my fresh springs are in thee." Let us trace the apostle through his interesting course, with the view of discovering these excellencies, and we

shall assuredly find them. What else would have cheered him in prison at Philippi, and filled his voice with its exulting strain? What else would have caused him so earnestly to seek the best blessings for his oppressor, under whose stripes he had just been suffering? What else could have caused him, with a zeal not to be depressed by sufferings, to arise up from the ground where he had been left as dead, and to return to his perilous labours with equal avidity? How else would he have stood the brunt of scorn, ridicule, insult, blows, accusations, and all manner of accumulated afflictions, without once shrinking from his steadfast purpose of glorifying Christ in his body and in his Spirit, as his own blood-bought property; persisting in this disposition to his Lord with a degree of charity to men, that becomes the more surprising the more closely it is examined. The character of Paul is also very admirable, in the prudence and wisdom which attended his zeal and charity,—blessings which, like all his other possessions, he derived from the one inexhaustible source of his Lord's fulness. He was careful at all times to adapt his discourses to the character of his hearers; and being well furnished with scriptural arguments and information, with observation of character, with the nature of objects in creation from which suitable improvement might be deduced, these he arranged with great skill for their several services, and brought forth accordingly; consulting for the conviction and persuasion of the sinners whose souls he desired to win. He not only preached, but exhibited in his own life, the absorbing and supreme excellence of spiritual objects; of which he gave a remarkable instance at Athens. Amidst all those displays of science and the arts, by which he was surrounded, and amidst the variety of talents and disputers that were pressing upon him for observation, he was elevated to subjects super-

rior to these ; and entering into his responsible situation, as a witness for Jesus, he could keep his natural taste subordinate, and prefer to reason upon Jesus and his resurrection, in the simple eloquence of a wisdom that is not of this world, rather than court the adulation and respect of men by a display of his own native talents. A singleness of eye, a simplicity of love, a chastity of taste, exquisitely wrought in him by the Holy Ghost, actuated his soul, and presents him before us on these occasions with a peculiar grace. He was satisfied to be despised, to be accounted a babbler, to be poor, and to labour ; for he **cast himself upon** the Lord for his possession *here, as in eternity, and lived by faith.*

Many parts of the record of Paul's life enable us to discover that his heart was the seat of great *tenderness* ; of this we should not lose sight, for it adds an exceeding beauty to the whole character ; proving how richly the Spirit had combined his divine work in his soul, with every lovely and every commanding excellence. Bold and determined, severe and self-denying, hardy, and innured to suffering as he was, his bosom lost none of its *sympathies* by this experience : on the contrary, the more his personal affliction abounded, the more did relative affections deepen and flourish in his soul. We see him with generous intrepidity ready to adventure his own life for the defence of his friends, affectionately concerned for their safety and rescue from peril, and about to rush into the face of death in their behalf ; we see him again solicitous to prevent the risings of grief in the agitated hearts of those who bewailed the death of the young man, see chapters xix. 30 ; xx. 10 ; we look upon him in his various labours, consulting with the love of a parent or of a shepherd for the safety and preservation of the beloved souls for whom he laboured and prayed, addressing to them

counsel and comfort in the tenderest strains, separating them from associations that might endanger their peace, entering into the affliction which was endured by those who loved him, in the prospect of separation, and, whilst acting with Christian resolution and manly firmness, not ashamed to confess the yearnings of his heart and the conflict he endured ; see Acts xix. 9 ; xx. 18—38 ; xxi. 12, 13.

The habitual humility, which was manifested in the spirit of the apostle, is a striking attendant of his labours. Distinguished as he was by success in planting various churches—honoured as he was by continual visions from the Lord and personal assurances of divine favour and protection, he never vaunted himself of these, nor presumed upon the promise to the neglect of the use of means ; he was as diligent in *seeking* deliverance as if deliverance had not been promised.—In spiritual interests he prayed, kept under his body, exercised *himself* day and night in watchings and discipline. In temporal interests he sought preservation by labour, by prudent precautions, by appeals to such as were in authority to protect him, and always testified that it was to the praise of his God he *continued*, having received “ *help from God.*” In the exercise of this humility he was nourished and fed by the blessed perceptions which he had of the invisible world, wherein he realized the glory of Jehovah, the triumphs of Emmanuel’s kingdom, and all those great realities of judgment and eternal joy or grief belonging to the future worlds. And living correspondently with these dependent views, he was found in possession of conscious integrity, manifesting a consistency which gave him power even to the consciences of the heathen, and enabled him to exhibit in all his varied conditions, in prison, at the bar, or in the midst of accusers, a spirit calm, dignified, and charitable. So little were his enjoy-

ments depressed by outward events, that he could honestly express his best affection for others by wishing they were altogether such as he was, excepting his bonds ; for truly he experienced, that in the liberty of the gospel, joys were ensured which nothing sublunary could affect. We have a very full developement of these affections in the course of that tempestuous voyage which is recorded in Acts xxvii. Paul had frequently longed to have his way directed providentially to Rome, hoping that he might there receive and impart spiritual refreshment, Rom. i. 10, 11. 13. His desire was now about to be gratified, but in a very different manner, probably, to that which he had anticipated : he entered on his way as a *prisoner* bound with chains, he saw himself associated with malefactors who for various offences were taken to Rome at the same time with himself ; he was suspected on this occasion of being a murderer ; his opinions and counsels were despised or lightly esteemed by those around him ; he was passing onwards to encounter innumerable unknown evils before the bar of Cæsar !—That he was susceptible of those painful feelings, which are inseparable from our nature under such circumstances, is very evident ; for we find him thanking God, and *taking courage* from the sympathy he met with from some brethren who met him on his way, Acts xxviii. 15. In addition to these trials, he was exposed to the terrible tempest which beat upon the vessel, and in the history of which we clearly perceive how much of exposure, toil, danger, and distress were encountered. All these circumstances serve but the more forcibly to demonstrate the victory of grace in his soul. With disinterested zeal he is as forward to administer comfort, contribute his services, and speak in cheering words to his companions, as if he had no pressure upon his heart of individual sorrows or cares. The conso-

lation he had received from his Lord during the tempest, he was desirous to share with his fellow sufferers ; and with a holy assurance in the promise, he without hesitation, encouraged them to believe that they should outlive the storm. In the midst of encompassing darkness, howling winds, and the raging waves of the sea, even when every hope seemed about to be destroyed by the wreck of all, this saint of God stood firm, spoke of the Ruler of the tempest, exhibited unshaken affiance in his power, distributed bread to the exhausted crew, and maintained the consistency of a triumphant faith, even in this extremity *giving thanks!* In Rome he manifested the true Christian spirit that animated his breast. Revenge was not a passion which lived in his affections ; basely as his nation had treated him, he declares he had nothing whereof to accuse them ; their murderous designs, and all the personal indignities which he had suffered from them, were buried in his charity ; the fire of his bosom was regulated, and burned with indignation only when the name of his beloved Lord was dishonoured. Confined, and in many respects comfortless as his condition was when a captive, he found it joy and peace when he was permitted from morning to night to expound the kingdom of his Saviour, receiving all who came to him, happy thus to cast his bread upon the waters, and as contented when preaching as a prisoner, as when he was at liberty to compass sea and land. Thus the apostle was gloriously conformed to Jesus. He stands before us as one of the most legible epistles written with the finger of God. The Holy Ghost has appeared in this instance to delight in showing us what he will and can effect, when he inscribes upon his prepared creature the fair and lovely law of the gospel of life and peace. Yet it has pleased him to remind us, even in this example of redeeming grace, than which perhaps there is not one more

eminent upon record, that there is but *one perfect pattern*, even Jesus Christ. We have passed through a view of great excellencies, dating them from the period of Paul's conversion; but even in this space we have had reason to observe that there are flaws and imperfections in the most excellent of mere men. We discover this on the occasion of that dissention which took place between Paul and Barnabas, wherein *both* were evidently to blame. Paul was too warm in his resistance of Barnabas, and possibly too suspicious of Mark. He also committed an error in listening to the counsel of James by which he exposed himself to severe sufferings, and might have been charged with an *apparent* want of consistency with his own calling. When exasperated against the high priest, there was an undue degree of excitement. The emotion arose from strong indignation at the abuse of power, but it was expressed like a natural man, and had the heat of nature in it, very different from the dignity and meekness of his Lord, who when smitten on the face calmly remonstrated against the injustice. Here however, whilst we blame the apostle in the expression of his resentful feeling, we must observe upon the instant victory obtained by the gracious principle, which enabled him, even in the midst of the beating tumult which possibly at that moment throbbed in his breast, to express his sorrow for having even in appearance transgressed a divine law. His apology to his reprover was humble, courteous, and full of reverence to the authority of God.

It will be interesting to us, ere we close our view of Paul's character, to examine what transpires through his many Epistles, of the experience of his soul, and the motives by which he was habitually governed as an Apostle, a Minister, and a Christian. This will confirm the impression

already received through the historical part we have considered, and will help us in contemplating the several parts of his character distinctly.

His affections, as we have seen, burned ardently for Christ, not as he declares, *after the flesh*, not in a love bounded by national prejudices, or held after the law of a carnal commandment, not in mere ceremonies, not in personal interests alone, but in the enlargement of an affection, unbounded for the glory of the Lord, and embracing the remotest regions of the earth. Gospel liberty had loosed him from Jewish bigotry, and enabled him to interpret the promise of the Messiah after the *spirit*, and not as formerly after the *flesh*. In this disposition we find the Apostle embracing the *Lord's glory in souls*, and wherever discovered, a subject of high delight to him. Converts brought to the faith by other instruments, and from other nations, were beloved by his heart; he esteemed himself a debtor to these, prayed for them, longed after them, and was persuaded of blessings upon and by them. Rom i. 7—15.

Towards his own people, he exhibited laborious love with every precious combination of the particular feelings due towards them. As an *Apostle*, shewed himself possessed of a delegated authority from God, over the mysteries of God, whilst as a *steward*, he was bound to distribute according to the will and honour of the glorious owner, and for the benefit of his redeemed family. 1 Cor. iv. 1, 2. As a vigilant *shepherd*, carefully adapting his food to the age and condition of the flock over which he was appointed to watch. 1 Cor. iii. 2. As a *nurse*, tenderly careful of the precious trust of nurturing the growing soul, and gently administering help and sympathy. 2 Thess. ii. 7. To the Jews evidencing the fervour and truth of his zeal towards them, for their sakes being willing to be accused after the example of Christ, and to be a

sacrifice for the furtherance of their faith, were it possible by so doing to win them to Jesus. In which spirit he could appeal to God, that he prayed and groaned for them with a continual heaviness of heart for their unbelief, having no prejudice against them as they supposed, but being willing to admit all their privileges, all their claims, and wishing only to establish them by leading their hearts to their Messiah. Rom. ix. 1—5: x. 1, 2: xi. 11. To the Gentiles continually magnifying his office, shewing them how he gloried in his peculiar appointment to them; and earnestly exhorting that they should walk worthy of their new and wonderful privileges. Rom. xii. 1.

In this zeal for souls, he lived in a region congenial with his new nature, and in satisfaction with his work, triumphed over all circumstances; and in all the various results to his ministry. 2 Cor. ii. 14, evinced an ardour for the Lord's glory, in which all other considerations were swallowed up. 1 Cor. xvi. 22. Gal. i. 8. 2 Thess. iii. 14. 2 Tim. iv. 14. In these expressions he was moved by *simple* zeal, having all his affections centred in the one great desire, that Jesus should triumph, and his foes should fall. It is evident that this emotion was genuine, and a purely disinterested feeling, so far as his own relative condition was concerned; because even as standing in connexion with these Anathemas against determined opposers of truth, his bosom gave forth the expression of unlimited charity to his *own* opposers. 2 Tim. iv. 16. Phil. i. 18.

In the prosecution of his work, he was ever ready to *demonstrate* his simplicity *practically*; for although contemned by natural men, for the spirituality of the weapons he used in his warfare, he adhered to these, knowing that the excellency of the power is of God and not of man. 1 Cor. ii. 1—8. Free as he was both as a Christian, and in his temporal circumstances had he not embraced

christianity, he voluntarily made himself servant to all, and surrendered every earthly distinction for the prize of the spiritual kingdom, and the service of souls. 1 Cor. ix. 17—27 : in this course being animated by a true spirit, not with lordly feelings, 2 Cor. i. 24 ; but with charity, 2 Tim. ii. 10 ; a disposition remarkably manifested in his Epistle to Philemon, wherein notwithstanding his authority, both as an Apostle, and as the spiritual counsellor of this believer, he preferred to entreat him as a brother, and for love's sake ; see Phil. 9.

In the acceptance of the cross, his natural passions were subjected ; his own appetites, case, or indulgence, were all laid prostrate at Jesus' feet, and left to be at his disposal. 1 Cor. vi. 12 : ix. 27 : viii. 13. In the censures and judgment to which he was exposed from ignorant or prejudiced men, he rose above the present trial, looking to the righteousness of the eternal judge, and rejoicing in the possession of the inward witness. 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. 2 Cor. i. 12. Yet with all this superiority to the opinions of the creature, he was grateful for kindnesses, and deeply sensible of the comfort which the Lord graciously afforded through fellow saints. 2 Tim. i. 16—18.

In the midst of these high attainments, Paul confesses himself to be still a *conflicting* soul. Many very touching scriptures present themselves on this ground. He writes to the Romans with a full discovery of the nature of that warfare in which he was engaged internally, declaring his privilege as a believer in all its full extent, having the blessed principle by which he delighted in the holy spiritual law, and the life of faith, by which he could cast his burden with rejoicing confidence upon the triumphs of Jesus ; yet, conscious of a law in his members, warring against this better law of his mind, tending in its nature to *captivity*, opposing and obstructing him in the high calling

wherein he lived, and forcing from him in moments of conflict the bitter cry of "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death." Rom. vii. Under the endurance of those tribulations which came upon him from without, he was susceptible of many internal sufferings, owing to the condition of a soul still encompassed by temptations; and although victorious here, as in the more immediately spiritual conflict, he speaks of an exercise wherein he felt perplexed, cast down, having his treasure in an earthen vessel, and passing through an experience of conscious personal weakness. When called upon to address the language of severity against his beloved flock, it cost him much individual grief; he had rather administer the word of consolation, and the necessity of doing otherwise, afflicted his own soul; see 2 Cor. iv. 7—9: iv. 4: vi. 4: xi. 23—30. He had also a source of temptation from some inward cause, which is not particularized; a thorn in the flesh was given to him, lest he should be exalted above measure, by the abundance of the revelation he had received; the Lord thus in mercy *preventing* the evil. Yet by reason of native infirmity, it was made a messenger from Satan, or an instrument or weapon in the adversary's hand, wherewith to buffet him. 2 Cor. xii. 7. That it was something exceedingly bitter to his soul, is evident from his importunity to be delivered from it. It has been conjectured by some, that it was something affecting him visibly: possibly some nervous or convulsive agitation of the frame, occasioned by the power of those divine ecstasies to which he had been admitted. Gal. iv. 14. But as the Holy Spirit has not seen it good to communicate this particular, it is not for us to be solicitous to determine it. On the contrary, the very uncertainty is a blessing, inasmuch as it affords to every conflicting believer, a comforting power of applying the

Apostle's words to himself. A service which, no doubt, the Apostle would rejoice that christians should find from his trial; for he ever desired to exhibit himself as a pattern to others for encouragement, and as a memorial of surprising grace. Eph. iii. 8. 1 Tim. i. 16. Under these conflicts, we cannot be surprised that Paul should so frequently utter longing desires after that rest which awaited him, when he should put off the mortal tabernacle wherein he groaned, being burdened; or that he should profess his belief, that to depart and be with Christ is far better. Yet, whilst he longed for his crown, and panted for the higher liberty known by the saints above, submission and charity mingled their sacred influence with the ardent wish, tempering his affections, and making him willing gladly to remain in the field of battle for the gospel's sake. 2 Cor. v. 1, 4. Phil. i. 23, 25; iv. 11. Neither were his views of this life cheering to him only on the behalf of others; he felt that unto his latest day he might be making increase in his soul in the heavenly life, and that it is a season for ardour, in pressing after ever-advancing spiritual riches. Phil. iii. 11—14. An ambition, unmingled with doubt or apprehension of the result, for he knew whom he had believed, he was persuaded of his faithfulness to preserve him unto his heavenly kingdom, and knew that by the grace already received, he had fought the good fight, had nearly accomplished his course, and should finally be crowned by the hand of his righteous Saviour. 2 Tim. i. 12: iv. 6, 8. Gal. ii. 20.

The holy affections of the apostle are now fully satisfied! Conflicts are over, and the rest is his. The everlasting doors have been opened to receive his ransomed soul, and Paul now celebrates, in higher strains than he could sing on earth, the height, and depth, and breadth, and length, of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge!

It is to be hoped we have derived individual improvement, whilst passing through the several points that have been before us in this character, yet it will further benefit the soul seriously to meditate upon those particulars, which more immediately present us with what belongs to the history and experience of every spiritual pilgrim who is travelling to the eternal kingdom. When we compare the condition of Paul with our own, previously to conversion, we discover the same features, although, it may be exhibited in different degrees; and we should learn to admit from such evidence, that there is a manifest difference between every thing merely natural and that which is gracious. Natural principles may go very far, in all the exterior of what is amiable and attractive; and, from no other source, a man may be like Paul, studious, humanly virtuous, zealous, scrupulous, conscientious, and respectable. This is a state not so provoking to the displeasure of God, although it be a state of spiritual death, as that of the determined offender against light; and Paul considered this in his own case. Yet it is far from *spirituality*; for the conscience remains ignorant and corrupted, it therefore dictates, approves, or otherwise, by a standard that is not scriptural or acceptable; and the life of such persons is in consequence destitute of real discernment, pure motive, or gracious integrity. This has been shewn in many instances; and, being undeniable in the case of Paul, should put us upon the investigation of our professed uprightness, morality, and zeal. Possibly we shall readily discover under this exterior, the passions which disgraced the apostle, by moving him to the bloody career of his first days. Pride—especially moved to action when our opinions, religion, or practice, are disputed or condemned—frequently leading us to acts of oppression, injustice, and persecution, to the extent of our power; and in

repeated instances filling us with resentments, and bringing out a display of bigotry, sufficiently evincing that we are not in possession of the Spirit of true religion, whatever our profession may be. In short there is nothing but *conversion* which will give to man the proper action of his conscience, or the real principle of faith or morality ; all else is but a splendid delusion, and will leave a man to perish at last in the sparks of his own kindling.

The everlasting purposes of God are displayed towards sinners of every description, and by his various dispensations he meets the vessels of his mercy in the road of perdition, arresting them by revelations which are equally forcible to the inward man, as those made to Paul. Supernatural light shines forth directing its glorious beams immediately to the path where the sinner is travelling contentedly by the light of nature ; in these surpassing rays Jehovah communicates feelings and discoveries hitherto unknown, and by the invincible purpose that attends them, causes the soul to fall prostrate before the cross ; personal provocations are revealed in their unsuspected and hideous forms ; the glory of God in Christ is manifested in the only revelation of Jehovah made to sinful man ! The consequence of these discoveries is humiliation, amazement, alarm, and expressions of submission, leading to increased exercises of prayer, and a growing sense of the aggravation of those sins which have been committed against the Lord. Thus the manifestation made to Paul, with its effects upon the soul, is but a figure of what will always follow gracious visitations from the covenant, to such as are arrested by its power in their path of revolt and sin. Usually there will also be a holy influence pervading the soul, which will so absorb the thoughts and affections in this one object, as to eclipse all others ; and the whole mind will be so engaged in the

wonderful discoveries which are now possessed, as to be comparatively indifferent to even necessary food ; the desire of the heart being after the full appropriation of the great salvation, without which no other object can now give peace. In conversion, the practical effects of divine revelation will be powerful and peculiar, and it will clearly appear, in all such cases, that it is a new *creation*, for the whole existence will be visibly new. Old things are now passed away, and first principles being changed, after fruits and results will correspond. In consequence, the mode of address to Jehovah is now entirely altered. In place of formal pharisaic prayers, the heart is opened by the affecting stroke which broke the adamantine stone, and from this source there issues sighs, confessions, pleadings, vows, wherein the spirit of faith is in lively action ; and spiritual subjects are earnestly appreciated. This alone is *prayer* in the sight of God ; and never until this is effected is it said of any man “ Behold he prayeth ! ” There is great emphasis in this little word “ *Behold*,” when so connected. It seems intended to convey the idea of the *unusual* act in the person engaged in this address, and, at the same time, the subject of *delight* which this should be to all who are interested in the conversion of that soul. It is as much as to say, behold he liveth—he loveth—he believeth !—and it conveys to us the richest promise of the final blessedness awaiting such an one ; for never does a sinner *so* pray without assuredly inheriting at last the world of praise. With this blessed newness of communion with the Lord, there will of course be a new choice of companions and pursuits ; and every convert will seek to unite himself with the disciples of Jesus. All former companions will be forsaken, excepting as opportunities may be sought for affectionately urging upon them the reception of that Lord by whom the soul is made free. And should it be

that, in some instances, the Lord's people seem not so cordial as we expected, and harbour suspicions of our sincerity, if we are really humbled, this will not offend ; for we shall call to remembrance the cause we have given for their doubts, and shall willingly wait for the clearing of our Christian pretensions before all men.

Having entered upon the life of faith, we may be instructed in the fruits we have to cultivate, by contemplating what we have seen in Paul. Under all circumstances it is necessary that we have *zeal*. This is a grace which is inseparable from the new creature, and will find abundant occasion for exercise. It must flow forth towards all past associates in sin or ignorance, to all strangers of whatever nation or clime, to all adversaries however injurious and desperate towards us, to all flocks of believers wherever situated or however circumstanced ; and it must live in the midst of privations, bodily endurances, conflicts, deaths ! When Jesus Christ takes possession of the affections, we are filled with fervent desires for the advance of his glory ; and along with this we feel the *mind* of our Lord, which yearns over the lost, and looks for the salvation of the wretched souls of men. These two powerful motives—love to Jesus, and charity to men—working together in the breast under the operation of the Holy Ghost, will produce those surprising effects which we have seen in the apostle : leading us, according to our measure, sincerely and fervently to give ourselves to this high and sacred service. In the spirit of a Christian, especially of a *leader*, this zeal must be held with *decision*. Our desire for the glory of Christ, in the *happiness* of men, must not induce a deviation from the strict rule of severity, which in many cases is absolutely requisite. There will be in every age persons who display a disposition subtly to resist the truth ; making injurious

attempts against souls, and demonstrating that they are children of the evil one. We must be prepared for these occurrences, and furnished with impartial intrepidity, so as promptly to express God's awful declarations of vengeance upon such adversaries, and our own entire acquiescence in the judgment; since, if our zeal be genuine, we shall desire the health of the body, and not shrink from the cutting off of a mortified limb in order to preserve the whole. This consideration will be enough to convince us that *Christian* zeal is a peculiar grace, and needs to be under close and constant investigation, and to be perpetually maintained in dependence and prayer. There is no means that will be so effectual to the promotion of this grace as the lively *appropriation* of the great interests which we plead. If we are fully persuaded of the truth we embrace; if it is enthroned in our hearts: if we are assured of our own individual interest in it: if we truly admit and feel our responsibility: we shall be prepared to act with decision in our testimony. It is such an internal revelation of the Son of God, which puts us in possession of the Spirit that immediately consults not with flesh and blood, raising us far above all human consideration, and giving us a motive for action which will support us in supporting the object of our profession, and cause us not to *give place*, no not for an hour, in the great controversy between the powers of light and darkness. This disposition will perhaps be ignorantly reproached as a spirit of pride, or obstinacy, or bigotry! The fear of this must not induce a relaxation of our principles; but it should excite in us a very diligent attention to the regulation of our temper; so that it may clearly be seen that we can yield in matters of indifference, can concede where truth is not endangered, and do possess a mind embued with meekness, and the gentleness of Christ. It

is true, even this will not deliver us from misrepresentation and reproach. But we have to do with *one* Judge ; and if we are walking by his rule, it is a small matter for us to be judged of man's judgment. Here, however, great humility is required, or we shall be in danger of committing an error, either by turning to the right hand or to the left. It is difficult to maintain an equal irreproachable observance of decision with meekness ; of firmness with lawful concessions ; and we must be upheld by the omnipotent Spirit. This is the practical possession of the privilege boasted by Paul, of knowing no man after the flesh ; a privilege, which is far from weakening the obligations which bind men and Christians together ; for Christianity enjoins tenderness, natural affection, and the exercise of *all* relative feelings ; but it introduces the believer into the power of regulating his affections by the heavenly standard, and of subjecting all present interests to the great concern of the honour of Emmanuel. Let us cultivate this loving simplicity, so full of tenderness to men, and truth to Christ. Whilst cultivating this life, we shall be found prepared for the submission of our wisdom to that of the great head of the church ; for even our zeal must be *directed* by him. The testimony of his redeeming love is to the souls of men what the running streams to the ocean are to the natural earth, and we may well rejoice to turn our course to the desert scenes where moral and spiritual vegetation are under a frightful blast. But the Lord is the ruler, and to him it belongeth to open the channels, and give the course, where he purposes that the testimony shall run. To this we must give heed, waiting the providential intimations of the Lord's will respecting us ; and in all missions, ministerial appointments, subordinate helps (such as schools, religious institutions, &c.) leave off *anxiety*, committing the appointment

and the prosperity of our efforts to the divine will. The benefit derived to ourselves by this disposition is incalculable. It renders us cheerful under all seeming disappointments ; it keeps us ever looking to the Holy Ghost for the divine leadings : it keeps us therefore in lively fellowship with him from whom all our comforts flow ; it makes us satisfied to labour extensively, or to be circumscribed in our course ; it fills us with equal zeal for the smallest as for the largest assemblies ; it gives an ardour to the affections of our heart, whether called out to a great congregation or to one individual soul ; and amidst the oppositions which arise against us, it invests the soul with unmoved serenity, and gives the power of singing in prisons, rejoicing in stripes, and displaying to the world that our faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the means of supernatural joy.

How distinguished is our lot, if this span of life, which we so fondly cherish, is devoted to its proper end, and thus consecrated to the Lord ! it is thus graciously precious to ourselves, and relatively profitable to others. With such an experience, this present world is rendered a sanctified abode ; for it is a scene wherein we are obtaining increase in possessions, that will be perfected in glory. We may then cherish life as a talent, and be willing to remain as long as the Lord shall ordain ; and we shall possess, at the same time, advancing desires to depart and be with Christ as our better and final portion.

Since these are the privileges, and such is the character of the true followers of Christ, let us bring the whole into a close application to our own interests in the way of self-examination ; so as to ascertain our present state, and stimulate our affections for the remaining portion of time allotted us in this world.

Let us examine whether we have affections

weaned from this love of sublunary objects, through the superior attraction of such as are spiritual and eternal ; so that we can truly affirm, we have none that we love or desire in comparison with him, by whose blood and righteousness salvation has been brought to our souls ? Are we living in the secret constant fellowship of our spirit with his, so that by him the world is crucified to us and we unto the world ? for him are we willing to endure the loss of all things, and in him to lead a crucified life, always bearing about in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our body ? In the midst of life's vicissitudes, in sorrow or joy, in favour or persecution, in prisons or in palaces, are we prepared to feel and to confess none but Christ to be worthy the devotion of the heart, or capable of filling it ? Do we love the secret hour of prayer—the opportunity to walk alone, that converse with the Spirit may be found ? Do we retain the recollection of past scenes when we sinned with a high hand, so that we are continually in the exercise of *penitential* faith, and ready to frequent the cross and grave of Jesus, with new impressions of grief and gratitude deeply lodged within the breast ?

Combined with those private affections exercised in simplicity before God, have we *public* affections also, which we evince before men ? Is our heart open to receive, and our feet prompt to seek, our *own company*, that is, *the brethren* ? so that in all places we select these for our familiar associates, and with them engage in converse of high sublime concerns, praying and communing together upon the interests of Jesus' kingdom ? and in these interviews are we careful to guard against whatever might endanger our firmness and simplicity for the Lord ? Here it may frequently be needful resolutely to stir up the spiritual gift that is in us, lest on some occasions we like Paul might be dis-

suaded by their affection from the sufferings that await us, or be induced to comply in ill-judged advice respecting concessions to be made for others, when in fact our part is to hold on one unbroken way correspondently with the revelation which the Spirit has made respecting us. We are usually more in danger from the influence of advanced Christians, partial friends, and the tender sympathies of those who love us, than from the fierceness of the proudest adversary, and should be vigilant on this ground. Can we say that the Holy Ghost, as a merciful guardian of the inward life, extends to us this Spirit of watchfulness, so that even when the tendernesses of nature are all alive we can say with the Apostle, "why go ye about to weep and to break my heart, I am ready not only to be bound but to die for the name of the Lord?"

How is it that we feel towards such as are in the wide world. Believers must be *workers*; have we a heart to work, having first counted the cost, and considered that there is no publicity for Christ's sake, that will not be attended by a proportion of trial which cannot be borne but in the strength of the Lord? Believers have much to contend with in themselves which will expose them to conflict; and Satan will frequently take occasion to work upon some infirmity, or some constitutional propensity, greatly harassing the mind, and sometimes causing cries of anguish and confessions of wretchedness. Are we prepared to encounter this not only as private Christians, but as in many instances arising out of our public appointments, or as suffered in order to inure us to an experience with which we must sympathise in others? And do we remember that saints are considered by the world as a *pestilence*, their doctrines being abhorrent to natural men, and in consequence they as sheep appointed to be slain? Such a spirit existing in unregenerate men will of course be demon-

strated, we know not *how* or to what *extent* as it respects ourselves, but are we prepared in faith and dependence for what may thus arise, and ready to overcome in *love*. This is the disposition in which we should stand before the bar, encounter stripes, and listen to accusers ; seizing the opportunity for delivering the message of life, and testifying, without fear, of the requirements which belong to the everlasting gospel. We are permitted to unite with this readiness to suffer, and mercy to our enemies, a due sense of the enormity of the crimes of those before whom we stand, so as to address the words of remonstrance and reproof. We may also, on some occasions, demand concession from those who have acted with injustice. The credit of the gospel in us may sometimes require this ; so that we may act as Paul did to the magistrates, when he required them to come and fetch him from the prison, where they had unrighteously confined him. But we must not allow this feeling to degenerate into natural resentment, or desire for personal justification, otherwise than as the cause of truth is involved. The example of Paul will demonstrate that we must be watchful in these times of trial ; for he, who thus habitually lived in self-government, was twice betrayed into an exasperation of temper. Let us not be presumptuous, but watch against angry disputations with brethren, and against all heated expressions against flagrant injustice in foes. And let the different parts of a Christian's holy calling become subjects of inquiry in our own individual profession.

In the interesting scene described in Acts xxvii. we seem to have the summing up of the whole history of the spiritual course which the Apostle steered, and in which believers after him are also engaged. We are navigating a sea where contrary winds and fierce storms await us : we are, in the judgment of men, associated with malefactors

—have our counsels despised—and even those persons who, from natural benignity, may be disposed to treat us kindly, will evince a determined opposition to our *spiritual* testimony; so that these things may bring upon us mortification, expose us to inconvenience, and sometimes to loss. Men in their sins are disposed to listen to congenial advisers; they flatter one another that all will be prosperous, because some transitory *south wind* may blow: and so long as this outward peace smiles upon them, they will not admit the probability of storms or tempests. Neither is this all. Even Christians will sometimes (owing to their want of maturity in the life of faith) be inclined to favour the advice of strangers, rather than that of able and experienced saints; they lean to what seems to promise personal ease, and will often shrink from places, situations, and connexions, that are not *commodious*; and will launch into schemes and undertakings which are perilous, and from which the more judicious and enlightened believer would have dissuaded them. In some instances this ill-judged conduct will involve the more prudent, owing to their close connection with them in the affairs of this life, or in their appointed lot; and if this should be the case, the exercise of faithfulness and charity must be prompt. It is our duty to represent the error that has occasioned this distress, but to do it with sympathy, and with the most resolute endeavour to repair the loss or sorrow which has been induced; always labouring, along with the use of means, to direct the expectations of the sufferers to him on whom it is our privilege to repose in every condition. This will be needful in many respects, for the Lord chastens the imprudence of his children by painful exercises, comparable to the tempest beating upon the vessel. He will break the carnal schemes, and disappoint the perverse expectations, which

have moved the soul to transgression ; and sometimes will bring them to such extremity, as will oblige them to cast overboard their creature or earthly possessions ; shewing them how insufficient all things are without the blessing of the Lord ; and that, in fact, worldly objects are frequently an incumbrance, threatening to sink us to the bottom of the pit, rather than carry us to a desirable inheritance. How often are believers in the situation of being exceedingly tossed with tempest ! their sun obscured, the stars of the firmament no longer lending their light, hope almost expiring, or, if remaining, only expressed in sighings and sadness, “ *wishing for the day !* ” These are special seasons for the demonstration of our own principles as believers. It is a time of peril to poor sinners ; the sea of this world is dangerous and deceitful, hidden rocks abound, and when the vessel is tempest-tossed, it is in peril of striking on these, and being utterly lost. Now is the time, therefore, to cast out the anchors, and whilst we are looking for the breaking day, to urge upon ourselves and others the lively exercise of hope, love, faith, and prayer. These shall sustain us, and although, like the final event to the ship before us, we may suffer the loss of all outward possessions, and even the mortal tabernacle be broken in the storm, our *soul* shall never suffer wreck or loss, for he who ruleth the storm is our Lord and Deliverer. Whether our particular trial may be of an inward spiritual kind, or of domestic affliction, or of national calamity, or of sorrows in the church, we ought to conduct ourselves like Paul in the vessel, not only maintaining our own consistency but acting to others as a witness for the Lord, and animating them to confide in him even unto death. Even when terrible afflictions are induced as *chastisements* for our presumption or earthliness, we must not despond, for we live by faith, and in

the midst of desolation may hope in the Lord. But we should earnestly covet, in all our spiritual concerns, rather to have an abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom; for better is it to come to shore as a richly laden prosperous vessel, than to escape the wreck merely, as on boards and broken relics of the ship. For *this* day we well may long, for then the storms of life will be quiet for ever.

Here let us pause upon the interesting record which we have examined; again and again look to the instructive page, from whence the Holy Spirit gives inexhaustible counsel and purest comfort; and when we see the riches of divine grace thus eminently glorified in men of like passions with ourselves, magnify the fruitful covenant, and live upon its fulness. In this way we shall be nurturing the soul with wholesome provision, and be pressing onwards to the blessed hour, when, like Paul, we shall exultingly exclaim, "I have finished my course!" And whilst receiving the crown, with grateful praise cast it at Jesus' feet saying, "Worthy is the Lamb!"

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY and ever blessed Jehovah, O may we enter at this time into Thy presence with our hearts under a praying grateful influence, and receive from Thee those blessed communications which are the fruit of Jesus' redeeming blood. Give us the Eternal Spirit for whom we supplicate with unwearied desire; and O fulfil Thy own merciful engagement to give him to those that ask. It is by his operation that powerful light is thrown into the understanding, and that true conversion enters the soul. He is the mighty power bringing

down the lofty looks of man, and breaking the stubborn heart, and by him it is that it can be said of any miserable sinner, "Behold, he prayeth." O that the Spirit of true wrestling may be given to us, and our smitten hearts yield unto Thee offerings of penitence and love! Good Lord, do Thou mercifully anoint us with the wisdom and grace that may fit us for the paths we are called to tread, and give us the ability to manifest with vigorous decision that we are Thine; no longer in bonds and fetters of spiritual death, but bound by the sacred chains of covenant love. Whilst loosed from captivity to Satan and sin, we would be imprisoned by Thy everlasting arms, and by the bonds of the covenant fast bound to the cross. O that in this we may glory as in our richest distinctions, and by it be crucified to the world, and the world to us. O Jesus, may we ever bear in our body the marks of true discipleship to Thee; and in a consecration of peculiar energy and grace be spent for Thy name. Let no tribulations deter us in our course, or induce a disposition to shrink from the labour of love. With Thy free promises continually cheer and sustain us, O Lord, and make us to encounter scorn, or persecution, or perils, or want, with that intrepid faith which ever rejoices in Thy will. Lord, we have presented body, soul, and spirit to be a living sacrifice to Thee; O take our offering, and seal our vows, and do Thou bless us with those consolations which are the dear inheritance of Thy chosen. We desire, in all situations a power to manifest that we are Thine; so that, whether it be in publicity or in private scenes, we may display the efficacy of the grace of the covenant. And for this end, O do Thou keep us in a life of dependence, humility, and love. May we have Thee for our indwelling portion, and make our boast of Thee as our eternal defence; and with lips anointed by the Spirit speak of Thy praise,

and proclaim Thy name. Give us a large measure of the anointing that is from above, and distinguish us, Eternal God, as helps to the faith of others. Lord, hear our cry—answer our petition—bring us in spiritual prosperity to final rest, to the glory of Thy redeeming love. Amen.

SIMON THE SORCERER.

Acts viii. 9—24.

THE awful character presented to our notice, under the ministry of Philip, falls next under our consideration, introducing us into a very affecting developement of the miserable effects of the corruption of human nature. Simon the Sorcerer is mentioned, in Acts viii. 9, as a person who lived in Samaria, and was engaged in a diabolical confederacy, by which he prevailed to infatuate and delude the miserable inhabitants of that region, professing to be some great one; and it seems from the expression used in the record, possibly supposed by these deluded sinners, to be the great Messiah. We have already seen that, when Philip came forth in the power of the Holy Ghost, working miracles in Jesus' name, the mind of Simon was arrested, and convicted of a superior ability possessed by Philip; in consequence of which he professed himself a believer, and was received by the Evangelist to baptism and fellowship. The more Simon beheld of Philip's course, the more he wondered, and was evidently much impressed by all that he beheld. When it was known in Jerusalem, that Samaria had received the word of God, the church in that city deputed Peter and John to visit that country, that by their apostleship greater benefits might be conferred on the converts, and persons be established from amongst the believers with ministerial power, whereby they might further the cause of truth in that region. Accordingly they visited Samaria, and having assembled the believers, they prayed earnestly for them, and laid their hands on them, and were

answered by the descent of the Holy Ghost, who became the author of their power as appointed witnesses for Christ. Simon beholding the wonderful effect, following upon the laying on of the hands of the Apostles, immediately conceived the idea that he might obtain a similar power, were he to proffer a sufficient price for the gift; and he as immediately made his proposal to the Apostles, requesting they would, in return for his money, give him the power of communicating the Holy Ghost to whomsoever he would. This proposal met with the indignant rebuke from Peter, which is recorded in verses 20—23; in which he pronounced that his condition was that of an unchanged and desperate sinner, without lot with the saints, and still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity: he however exhorted him to repent and pray, seeking forgiveness for this evil thought of his heart. The conscience of Simon was greatly terrified by these appalling words, and he trembled lest the judgment of God should fall upon him; he therefore entreated an interest in the prayers of the Apostles, that God would spare him, and not execute vengeance upon him for his sin. What ensued to this man we are not informed in the Scriptures, for he is never mentioned again. It is said by historians that he continued to practice his diabolical arts in conjunction with a professed estimation of the gospel, and that he was the founder of a vile and corrupt sect. At any rate he appears to us in the word of God as an awfully hardened sinner; and in his professed contrition without any marks of genuine sorrow of heart.

The particular features discoverable in this wretched transgressor, are all and each full of the demonstration of Satanic power, and the dominion of sin. He was indeed in common with other

men a sinner, in the gall of bitterness, being full of the bitter effects of the fall, and in the bond of iniquity, being fettered by the captive chains of sin ; but in addition to this, he had stood forth in the most desperate act of a rebel, holding a deliberate confederacy with the Devil, for the purpose of practising in those arts by which the whole perfection of Jéhovah is attacked, and the souls of men willingly and deliberately trapped to their everlasting perdition ; so that he was in the formal expression of the sin a conspirator with Satan for the destruction of men, at the same time that he made them his prey, living upon what he extorted by these diabolical measures. The conviction of such a man might be considered marvellous, and perhaps occasioned to Philip unspeakable joy, for he hoped that in him he beheld a brand plucked from the burning ; and truly there was nothing in the enormity of his sins which precluded this blessing, since the salvation of Jesus is equal to any measure of misery or need ; but Simon's impressions were not of a gracious kind. He had such a measure of light as served to convince him that the gospel word is *wonderful*, and that it exceedeth the conception of the natural mind, and the powers of earth or hell ; but it is manifest that he had no real light as to the nature of the gospel ; and it appears from his conduct, that he only conceived it to be a greater degree of those powers which he in measure already possessed. Whatever he might imagine of a change of *masters*, it is clear that he did not comprehend the difference of the nature of those masters, or the change of nature in himself which is requisite to a state of salvation. His principles were not in any degree changed, and his attendance upon the ministry of Philip had nothing in it of discernment, love, or godly fear. This was not perceived by Philip, who indulged the hope that Simon was really in earnest for

spiritual possessions, and truly a penitent. But the mask was withdrawn, when his prevailing sin was called out by circumstances; and his total ignorance betrayed, when he thought that the gift of God could be purchased by money. Such a power as he perceived in the Apostles, he considered a desirable acquisition as a means of furthering his influence, and of increasing his gains; for it is evident he looked upon the gospel as a *trading* concern. He judged the Apostles to be mercenary men, influenced by the same motives as himself, and that they might be induced to sell the gifts they possessed, and so empower him to grow rich by dispensing gospel privilege. We cannot have a more awful testimony of the darkness, depravity, and folly of this wretched sinner, so strikingly contrasted with every feature of true christianity, so opposite to the spirit of dependence, reverence, and sanctity belonging to the family of Jesus Christ. The alarm expressed by his agitated mind, was merely a burst of present emotion, arising out of selfish and carnal fear of personal suffering; he dreaded the infliction of some fatal disgraceful ruinous blow. He had seen the power of Jehovah as displayed through the instrumentality of his servants, and he trembled, lest, along with the detection and rebuke of his crime, he should receive a further sentence of destruction. He had neither inclination nor power to pray for himself; no faith, no anguish for his sin before God, no sense of the dreadful *native state* of which the Apostle had spoken, nothing but a terror of punishment, and a hope to escape through the prayers *of others*.

This man may be considered as a beacon raised up in the sight of men, to warn them of those delusions which are practised by the Devil upon sinners, and which alas! sinners practise upon

themselves. Examples such as these corroborate the affecting statement of the scriptures respecting man as a fallen creature ; and we should contemplate them with a view to discover the meaning of those awful testimonies which so constantly meet us upon this subject. Let us seriously consider the terms in which the Apostle here describes the condition of man, *a gall of bitterness, a bond of iniquity*, and let us compare these expressions with what is discoverable in ourselves, and in other sinners. Will not our impartial examination of our temper, spirit, and disposition, justify the application of the first sentence ? Is there no bitterness there, no tendency to this gall in our dealings with men, or in our feelings towards the spiritual gospel of a crucified Lord ? Alas ! we cannot plead exemption ; for even the softest temper, and the most amiable disposition, are bitter against the *pure* precept, the self-denying cross ; and frequently betray it frightfully, by a resolute course of opposition to its spirituality. The application of the last sentence is equally forcible, when referred to the condition of every unchanged soul ; for all these are captives, frequently *confessing* it in word, when they repeat “ we are tied and bound with the chain of our sins,” yet alas ! not so truly feeling it as to pray with sincerity, “ Let the pitifulness of Thy great mercy loose us.” Nevertheless it is true, and the fact is demonstrated in practice, and experimentally known, if we make an attempt to be free. The practice of sinners is undeniably that of an obedience to a corrupt law in their own members ; they are enslaved by lust, and they follow at its call ; and when by reason of the various motives which actuate transgressors to seek a deliverance from any domineering lust, they put forth an effort, how evident it is rendered that they are in a *bond* of iniquity, having a nature fast tied to the

drudgery of sin. Let us accept the humbling evidence, for as it is in vain to strive with our maker, so it is folly to deny what is self-evident; and if this be the true state of the case with every unregenerate sinner, let us feel some timely alarm for the result to our souls in the everlasting world.

We ought to be the more deeply convinced of the extent of this native misery, from the existence of a *possibility* that man can even profess faith in Jesus, attend a powerful ministry, see the wonders effected by it, be amazed and filled with admiration, associate with eminent saints and leaders, and yet be destitute of understanding, of love, or any work of the Spirit. And such instances have occurred, not only in the early times of the promulgation of the gospel, but in every age, and in ours also. This is a clear proof of the desperate degradation of our nature, and of its alienation from God; and truly affecting is the fact, that at this moment, there are numbers of persons who are *constantly* situated so as to have opportunities equal to those of Simon, and who can even discuss the gospel truths, and own their wondrous power, and yet be entirely unacquainted with its purifying and liberating grace. It is thus in every instance, where pride is unreduced; and where the love of the world prevails, such persons have their whole soul under satanic influence, and are not in the way of those holy and humble disciples who follow after truth, who have known the Son, and by whom they are made free.

How careful should we be that we do not in spirit commit the sin for which Simon was condemned. There are many forms in which this offence is perpetrated; and although men are not so gross in their conceptions in this day, as to dream of the *purchase* of the Holy Ghost by a formal proffer of money, they are not incapable of harbouring and demonstrating the same dispo-

sition in a more subtle form. We do not attain to a proper understanding of the *freeness* of the gift of God, so long as we are unenlightened by the divine teaching: we are constantly harping upon the theme of fitness, merit, qualification, &c. either in our words or in our inward sentiments and feelings, and never break away with a clear escape from the expectation of procuring the favour of God by something in ourselves, until, through the supernatural work of God in the heart, we are experimentally shewn the *true* state of nature; a state so helpless, poor, and profitless, that nothing can be produced from such a source but what would increase the *want* of *qualification* for blessing. This we learn by conviction of sin, and the humiliating discoveries we receive of our own deceitful hearts. But until then, we shall find that there is a constant propensity to the law of works, and that even if we have nothing else but *tears* to bring, we will count upon these tears as precious bribes for pardon and for peace. And what is this but thinking that the gift of God may be purchased with money? We come to ask, but we bring the bribe in our hand. There is no danger against which even God's children have more need to watch and pray than this; for since it is a native proud pretension, to which we are all disposed in some way, it will solicit even the humblest saint, and many times will induce an abasing experience of our total beggary, as a chastisement for our forgetfulness on this point.

There is an offence which, on account of its approximation to this crime of Simon is called simony:—when men, who have entered the ministry of the gospel, are induced to seek preferment, or to treat with others for offices and cures, wherein the dispensation of the Spirit to the souls of sinners is concerned. Proffering money, or certain conditions of a temporal and carnal nature for the

object of obtaining their wishes, they are considered guilty of this crime. They irreverently and presumptuously lower the sacred and awful duties of ministration to souls to the level of a bargain for worldly goods; and instead of considering the office as a solemn appointment to dispense the unsearchable riches of Christ, they enter and hold it for its emoluments, and, so far as their conduct is concerned, degrade the holy calling. It would be well, were all who occupy this high station duly impressed with its sacred character, and solicitous to be clear of the awful sin of secularizing the great work of the ministry. "The labourer is worthy of his hire," and they who minister in spiritual things have a right to reap the carnal things of such as receive their labour; but this should not open the door to the love or desire of "filthy lucre," and *will* not, when the heart is devoted to that calling, and simple in the solemn oath by which it is entered. Without this influence, we have reason to fear that the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity have not been removed by the work of grace.

With what humility should we guard against the disposition betrayed by Simon, when he received the rebuke which his transgression merited! It is not enough that we are so far convinced of our sin, as to be under conscious exposure to punishment: this may be the experience of thousands, whose hearts are undivorced from the love of sin, and unreconciled to the divine nature. Selfishness is so powerful a corruption in us, that we are capable of admitting the pangs of remorse, and even of self-reproach, when by our transgression we have exposed ourselves to censure or suffering; and some persons will go as far as Simon, in intreating an interest in the prayers of the faithful. But is it enough for us to be so conformed to the features of a man destitute of

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faith, and to go no farther? Are we to be satisfied with these demonstrations of the disposition of a slave, and never to look for the filial influence of the Spirit of adoption? Surely a reasonable mind will acknowledge that *safety* is not obtained, short of *reconciliation*; and a believing heart will know that where reconciliation is, a man will pray *for himself*, and breathe out the sorrow of a contrite heart into the ear of Infinite Mercy. Let us not rest short of this measure of conviction and humiliation; for otherwise we are in danger of becoming still more hardened in sin; our convictions only rendering us more desperate, and resisted impressions leaving us more awfully infatuated by sin.

We must not leave the subject, without calling to remembrance those passages of scripture which have already presented us with the view of the condemning nature of that particular sin in which Simon perished, and which had been for so long a time encouraged by the Samaritans. He was a *sorcerer*. In this day there are many who pretend to the same character, boasting of their power to penetrate into the secrets of the Almighty, and proffering for money to reveal these secrets to men. The crime is *monstrous*, it is an insult upon the Divine Being, which must necessarily treasure up a tremendous weight of retribution; and it is a lie from the father of lies, for no created power can wrest the divine purposes from the Eternal mind, or read the Infinite One. In general, it is a practice maintained by cunning, imposition, tricks, and villany, through which infatuated sinners are deceived. And if in this day there continueth a power, such as was of old practised by witches, &c. and which in every instance is a *limited* power, and a species of deception, this is to be considered as obtained by the influence of the devil, and is a diabolical trade deliberately opposed to God's

government, and carried on by the agreement of the devil's vassal with his foul master, on one hand, and on the other, by the consent of vile and rebel sinners, who are more willing to ask counsel of Satan, than to commit their cause to God. What then shall we pronounce against all fortunetellers, wise men (as they are called), witches and wizards? What shall we think of such persons as consult them; or who suppose it probable that by bad wishes, &c. men can blast them, and that by incantations and the power of the sorcerer they can defeat the blast? Alas, all these are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, and will perish with Simon Magus, unless they repent. Even Christian lands are disgraced and polluted by this crime! Let us not wonder at the Samaritans. Even persons of some light and understanding have been found guilty of giving credence to these pretensions, and of consulting such persons also, thinking them *some great power*. O frightful, soul-condemning sin! Offence most accursed and rebellious against God! Let it not cleave unto any who read the divine testimony, and who believe that Jehovah is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another. The faith of a *Christian* will not admit of this crime. It is enough for God's child to rest upon the bosom of divine government, and to leave all the arrangements of his way to the care of an Almighty Father, who is able to succour, and faithful to bless. In this portion let our souls repose in life and death.

PRAYER.

O most blessed and everlasting God, draw forth our affections unto Thee, we humbly pray, and make us to experience that powerful attraction, which causes the whole mind and soul to centre

its expectations in Thyself: and O do Thou mercifully extend to us the saving operations of covenant love, so that we may adhere to Thee in truest devotion and service. Unveil Thy glorious nature to our minds, with such bright revelations of Thy majesty and grace, as may cause us to be satisfied with Thy government, and peaceful in Thy presence; and whatever may be our worldly condition, O give us faith to enable us to see Thy wisdom in the appointment, and to follow Thee trusting in Thy guidance through the way. Keep us from all impatient desires to know what may await us; preserve us from seeking to pry into Thy secret counsels; and make us contented with the privilege of leaning upon Thee, and of confiding in Thee for each moment that we live. We desire, O Lord, to be deeply impressed with the awful truth of our native alienation from Thee; and to be instructed by the Holy Ghost in the mystery of iniquity, which we carry about with us in a fallen nature: for we are sensible, O Lord, that unless He is our instructor, we attain not to a true understanding of these awful facts. Painful and humiliating as such discoveries may prove, we would not start back from the revelation; we would not be proudly unwilling to search and examine ourselves, or backward to confess what we are. O mercifully subdue our rebellious feelings—kindle within us a holy fervor in following after all spiritual knowledge, and produce in us that deep and entire prostration of spirit before Thee, which becomes such sinners. Blessed be Thy name, that we can direct our desires and prayers to this object, because there is a covenant provision full of salvation, and that the extent of our misery does not exceed the extent of Thy mercy in Jesus. To this provision we look, trusting that we shall be sheltered in the righteousness and blood of the Lamb; and

that from him we shall derive the precious powerful anointing of the Holy Ghost within us, who will sanctify and bless us with a new creation, and make us partakers of the divine nature. O bring us to the experience of this covenant redemption, for Thy own blessed name's sake. Amen.

THE ETHIOPIAN CONVERT.

Acts viii. 27.

WE have been introduced already to the Ethiopian Convert, whose precious soul was the occasion of taking Philip from Cesarea into the desert ; but we return to what is recorded of him in the Scriptures, that we may give a more particular attention to his instructive example. The circumstances of this man as to this world were elevated ; he occupied a place of great trust under Candace Queen of the Ethiopians, having the charge of all her treasure ; but his mind had received the illumination of the Spirit, so that he had renounced heathenism and become a proselyte to the Jewish religion. According to these views, he engaged in those services which distinguished Jehovah's worshippers, and went up to Jerusalem to worship. It was on the occasion of returning from an act of this description that Philip addressed him with the testimony of Jesus. He was riding in his chariot, and engaged in studying the Hebrew Scriptures, his mind at that particular moment being arrested by the interesting passage in Isaiah liii. 7, 8. We have already seen how Philip was directed to join the traveller, and the consequent question he addressed to him, with its results ; by which the teachable inquirer was brought into the profession and fellowship of the Christian faith. We are further informed that "he went on his way rejoicing," and no doubt would carry with him to his own country the glad tidings which exhilarated his own heart, and which he would consider it a privilege to proclaim to fellow sinners. We are informed by history that he became the honoured

instrument of planting a church in his own land, which flourished in simplicity and devotion. The record in Scripture however is sufficient to satisfy us, that he was a blessed monument of divine grace, and experimentally acquainted with the liberty of the gospel.

It is interesting to us to turn our thoughts upon one, who is so evidently and eminently a vessel of mercy, chosen and set apart by the everlasting purpose unto eternal life. By what means he first became acquainted with the revelation of the one true and only God we are not informed; but according to the measure of his light, he embraced that revelation obediently and devotedly; his idols were renounced, and the object of his faith and worship was now, the great and glorious Lord. Along with this light in the understanding, there was that preparation of heart, which demonstrated that the Holy Spirit was the author of the operation, disposing him to the reception of those further discoveries which awaited his soul. That there was much ignorance remaining cannot be surprising to us; but we as clearly perceive, that there was a decided power of humility; teachableness, and inquiry, that could not have existed but by the gracious operation of the Spirit. Hence he studied revelation; not satisfied with what he had already attained, he hungered and thirsted after more; and having a heavenly guide, he looked to the true source of information, the word of God. This blessed revelation he examined, meditated upon, and read with an intense application of his soul, and with an evidently anxious solicitude to have the darkness of his views rectified or cleared. In this frame of mind he was prepared to accept the first opening for satisfaction which God's providence provided; and instead of being offended or startled by the question of a stranger, he immediately ad-

mitted the appeal, confessed his own inability to comprehend the text he read, and invited the instructions which he needed. He seems to have listened with mute and believing attention to the words of Philip. From so comprehensive a text, no doubt, the missionary would fully expound the kingdom of Messiah ; and during this period, the mighty work of the Holy Ghost was rapidly advancing in the breast of the hearer. His bosom glowed with fervour and appropriating faith in Jesus ; confidence mingled with the wonder which filled his now expectant love ; and, upon perceiving that they passed by some water in the desert, his ardent thought instantly presented the idea of being then baptised, without loss of time, or delay of the privilege. Every affection of mind, and heart, felt and acknowledged the demands of a crucified Redeemer. In him he now beheld the substance of promises, shadows, and types ; it was the light of life rising on his soul ; and in the glory of these beams, he proved the healing and the exhilarating effects of redemption, applied by faith. In consequence of this internal grace, the confession he made was sound and comprehensive ; and the experience of his heart was as of one who had found great treasure, and whose affections and desires were now filled. Thus he exhibits the nature of grace operating in power, and gradually preparing the sinner's soul for the manifestation of the way of peace ; and we consider him, according to this record, a diligent, teachable, lowly, and fervent disciple ; raised above the power of this miserable world, delivered from the bondage of the cruel dominion of Gentile abominations ; and blest with liberty to penetrate through Jewish ceremonies, and to shake off Jewish prejudices, so as to centre his believing affection in Jesus of Nazareth. Here he would indeed find rest to his soul ; and in the joy of his future pilgrimage, would become a

favoured witness to others of the blessedness of salvation.

Such revelations are replenished with the sweetest testimonies to believing hearts, especially as they unfold to us the everlasting purposes of Jehovah, engaging his divine attributes in behalf of his chosen people. It is manifested by such condescending acts of grace, that the Lord delighteth in taking the government of his children into his own divine arrangement, and that having called them into the possession of that principle, which imparts to them the breathings and desires of their soul after spiritual objects, he also disposes all things to the furtherance of the blessed work of their advancing fellowship with himself. In the history that is before us, we are possessed of cheering evidence that God's omnipresence is with us ; that he arranges every circumstance which belongs to us, that with him is the knowledge of the necessities, exercises, and condition of the redeemed ; and that in all their occupations and pursuits, they are seen and accepted by him. By the powerful persuasion of our minds on this subject, we are supported, as by the richest cordials, along our weary way ; and when nature is ready to faint, or solitude is becoming painful and burdensome to the heart, we have a spring whence invigorating draughts may be constantly drawn, and never shall be left to the dreariness of feeling *alone*. Blessed be our Lord, he is an observant companion in every step that we take, and will faithfully bring us into situations, or send to us such messages, as shall be instrumental to establish us in hallowed rest. This has been proved by many of us who now meditate upon these lines ; the retrospect of our past lives is ever affording us new memorials of this loving-kindness ; and both in the interests which are spiritual and temporal, we can

testify, that anxieties, cares, uncertainties, and inquiries have been relieved ; sometimes also in the most unlikely places, and by the most improbable means. How often have we found, that the Holy Spirit has been preparing us for the increased revelation of the divine name, by the very solitude which has tried our faith ! and that many times Scriptures (especially) which we have only read in our usual way, or have received without a suitable understanding, have been unfolded and applied, when, and where, we least expected the enrapturing discoveries. These experiences should be treasured up as precious memorials of Jehovah's praise ; we should consider them as pledges of future mercies, and use them to the nourishment of the life of dependance, and expectant faith. Ever let us as believers glorify God by realizing his omnipresence, and by giving our grateful assent to the testimony we have of his watchful Providence and never-ceasing love.

Great encouragement is afforded to the lover of his Bible by the example of the Ethiopian. God will acknowledge his own word, and having so abundantly provided for man, by the grant of revelation, will unquestionably smile upon the use of his own sacred appointment. The gift has been one of unspeakable mercy, perhaps too little considered even by those who receive it as a heavenly guide ; we should endeavour to obtain more lively apprehensions of the benefit, that we may be disposed to more vigorous use of it ; and if we are sensible of the wretched state of darkness, which would cover this fallen world if destitute of the beams shining through this medium, we should give practical evidences of our persuasion, by the diligence with which the sacred revelation is studied. An appreciation of its value to ourselves will likewise quicken our zeal in distributing the Scriptures to others ; and if we will receive this

history of the traveller, and of his commissioned instructor, with application to our individual circumstances, we must and shall admit that decisive arguments are before us for the importance of the dispersion of the Bible, and the sending forth of the missionary. The page of inspiration will carry with it a witness of its own divine original; and they, who receive the treasure, will usually experience a consequent dispersion of some of that midnight gloom which has enveloped their understandings. And the missionary travelling into desert scenes, in search of the lost sheep of the fold, will carry with him that ever faithful Spirit, whose office it is to apply his testimony, and thus to accompany the preached or expounded word with power. It is a blessing to be able to *read* the Scriptures; it is a greater blessing to meet with a wise interpreter; and when these are instruments united, and used by the divine teacher, the conversion is sound, legitimate, and lasting. We therefore to the utmost of our ability ought to aid the institutions which send forth the Bible and the missionary; we should do it in faith, endeavouring to realize how many a negro may be taught the way of life, and made to wash his Ethiopian soul in the fountain that shall make him white as snow! How many a Hindoo shall be constrained to quit his monstrous schemes of bodily torture and suffering for the accepted sacrifice of meritorious excellency! And how many savage haunts, where our fallen race are plunged in worse than brutal passion and debasement, shall rise to the intelligence, spirituality, and delight of a sanctified creature in Christ. And let us not depress our own energies by looking to the little prospect of fruit, or faint because the scene presents only some vast unpromising desert, or think that if but *one* soul is gathered it does not recompense our zeal, rather let us be *excited* by the consideration of

the desolation that appears; and remember also, that although *our* labour may be limited to the one soul who shall be given to our work, *that soul* may be ordained of God to be an Evangelist in his country, an ambassador of life to thousands of his fellow men! These thoughts are animating to our faith; and in every case we should be obedient to "cast our bread upon the waters." Who would not wish to be as Philip was, an instrument to the comfort and establishment of such a man as the Ethiopian traveller! Who would not rejoice to have been the means of putting into the hands of such an one the blessed Scriptures, that he may read! O if we feel this, in contemplating examples and cases brought immediately before us, as those are in the divine record, let us act consistently, and hear our Saviour's words, "Go thou and do likewise."

In our own experience of the divine work in the heart, we may, like the vessel of mercy, go on our way rejoicing, if we will admit into it the blessed treasure, the Lord Jesus in simple affiancé; his ready grace is amply sufficient to fill all the aching void, to heal all the maladies of sin, and to invest us with all the security of the promise. What can we need more of comfort, rest, or joy, than Jesus Christ can give? And since his gifts are without money, or price, wherefore should we not take him in all the freeness with which he stands before us proffering his love. Assuredly the result of this simplicity would be peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; and the pilgrimage upon which we have entered would be passed, in those peculiar enjoyments which accompany this grace. We too often depress our own comforts by encumbering our devotion to the cross with a thousand self-invented attendants upon the service: and instead of acting in the freedom of the grateful confidential love of children, we burden our poor souls

with a weight which presses us down to the earth ; and which after all, we must find too heavy for us to bear. When the gospel message is considered in its pure and simple terms, there is nothing but encouragement to the helpless and upright ; and even if we want uprightness, here only is the source whence the grace can proceed. And we shall invariably find, that in proportion to our joy in the Lord, is our strength ; so that all relative duties, and responsibilities, will be discharged with greater alacrity, and more to the honour of our God, by the possession of that holy gladness in him which he invites us to prove. Let us take for our subject of meditation, and as the opened spring of our consolations, the precious scriptural truths unfolded to the Ethiopian : in the Lamb that was slain, in the submissive sacrifice offered on the tree, in the infinite value of the atonement in that sacrifice, and in the glorious mystery of the Son of God, place all our trust, and make all our boast. So shall we run the glorious race in sure spiritual victory, and exultingly enter the kingdom of never-ending joy.

PRAYER.

ETERNAL God and Saviour, Thou source of life, of light, and joy, come and visit our souls in the plenitude of the Comforter's heavenly grace ; and O do Thou acknowledge us in the bonds of eternal mercy, and own Thy own promises, as sealed and sure in our hearts. Apply them, we pray Thee, as the healing remedy for our miseries ; and give us the precious sense of our fellowship with Thee. Our all is committed to Thee in faith and love : blessed be Thy name, we want, we ask no other protection, shelter, or home ; Thou art our refuge and strong tower ; thou art our habitation and

place of defence ; we desire so to realize this blessedness, as to experience the joy of Thy salvation ; and knowing that Thy uplifted countenance must ever impart the peace which passeth understanding, we would live beneath its beams, and run our race by its cheering light. O give us the privilege, and sustain us in the rich communion of high and heavenly fellowship in Thee. Gracious God, dispose us to read and meditate in Thy word, with believing and devoted desires, that we may search it as for hidden treasure, and may find in it the true gold. O make us to discover in the sacred record the history of redeeming love, running through the page, and filling the testimony with Jesus crucified ; and be Thou our heavenly teacher, our holy anointing, making us to understand all things. Blessed Lord, we would drink into the riches of the covenant, and know the unsearchable fulness that is in our living head. We would prove Thee, and try Thee, and live on Thee, knowing that Thou art inexhaustible in love and in power. And as we journey along our pilgrimage ; we would begin and close every day with tributes, that tell of Thy matchless grace, and exalt Thy everlasting name. Help us to attain unto this condition, pour forth an increase of all grace and comfort into our hearts ; and even in the very midst of labours, distresses, or griefs, O give us to rise buoyantly above the swelling seas, still trusting in Thee. We would use these Thy merciful visitations in the way of relative zeal, and strong devotion to Thy cause. Enable us to testify with power of Thy truth ; make us to become able witnesses of what Thou art ; and acknowledge our word as Thy truth, to the conversion of sinful souls. Make us to carry the savour of Thy name in every place and region, whither our course may tend, and ever to exhibit the grace of Thy redemption. And O may we

never faint or be discouraged ; may we aid and help all engaged in the work, and with unwearied confidence in Thy divine purposes give forth Thy word, send forth the missionary, hold forth the light, and on all occasions be ready with our voice to cry, “ Behold the Lamb !” Hear us in our earnest entreaties, O Lord, and let them enter Thy merciful presence in the blood and merit of the Lord Jesus, our Saviour and God. Amen.

ANANIAS.

Acts ix. 10 ; xxii. 12—16.

ANANIAS is presented before us, in the first instance, on the occasion of the conversion of Paul, as recorded in Acts ix. but he is again referred to in Acts xxii. with some particulars respecting his character, which give an increasing interest to the view we have of him, as appointed by the Lord to visit Saul in his state of humiliation and conviction. By comparing these accounts, we learn, that Ananias was a man in high estimation amongst the Jews before he embraced Christianity, and that he lived devoutly after the law. At what time he embraced the cross we know not. It is supposed by many that he was one of the seventy. However this may have been, it is evident that, at the period when Saul was met in the way to Damascus, he was in the possession of settled and confidential fellowship with Christ, and one much distinguished by the selection which Jesus made of him, to administer the consolations of the gospel to this rescued sinner. His place of residence was Damascus, the city into which Saul had been led by the hand after the vision by the way. The service to which this disciple was directed was to seek out Saul, of whom the Lord spoke as of one engaged in the spiritual exercise of prayer, to lay his hands on him, that by this act he might receive sight, of which he had been deprived by the glorious revelation that had been made to him ; and to go in confidence, since he had been prepared by a vision for his arrival, and for the benefit which he was to be instrumental to bestow. To this commission Ananias immediately advanced many

objections, especially observing upon his known character as a desperate persecutor, and upon the certainty that he had entered Damascus with authority from the rulers to destroy and oppress believers. These objections were silenced by the Lord, who repeated his commission, assuring him that he was a chosen vessel who should glorify the eternal name, both by labour and suffering, in the cause of truth ; and Ananias proceeded to fulfil the divine will ; which he did in much affection, zeal, and readiness, greeting the once persecuting Saul as a brother, and joyfully admitting him to his confidence in the Lord.

It is by the unerring witness of the Lord, that we learn to estimate the character of this man as demanding our warm and affectionate approval. As a *devout* Israelite he is at once exalted above the generality of his nation ; for alas ! Israel was fallen from that high rank, which once distinguished the people, as a nation singular in sanctity and holy privilege ; and but a remnant remained, in whom the true perception of their character and calling was preserved. In him we therefore conclude, that the Eternal Spirit abode, enabling him, previously to the revelation of the promise in Jesus of Nazareth, to observe the Jewish ceremonies with faith in the *substance* which they typified, and with a devotional exercise of soul, admitting him to fellowship with God in these services. It only remained, for the Holy Ghost to reveal to him, that his hopes and expectations were realized in the blessed Incarnate One, and thus to give into his bosom that further possession of knowledge and liberty, which was consequent upon receiving the Messiah as come in the flesh. With such preparation from the Holy Ghost, we of course expect to behold in the *Christian* discipleship the correspondent fruits ; and our hope is gratified ; we behold

the blessed developement of affections which accord with this increase of the divine revelation, and witness the more perfected privilege of access to the Lord in confidential affiance. His soul, thus elevated to the region of spiritual liberty, was accustomed so to commune with his God, that visions and the unfolding of supernatural objects excited no alarm in his breast; he met the divine manifestation without fear, and replied to the divine voice as friend with friend; well did he know the welcome voice—it was the voice of his beloved, and such sounds were ever acceptable to a heart fixed and devoted as his! These were blessed possessions, and exhibit a Christian disciple settled, believing, and intimate with his God!

Notwithstanding the excellent grace thus discoverable in the soul of Ananias, he was not free from the influence of human reasonings; and a degree of unbelief seems manifestly to have hung upon him, in reference to the object which the Lord called him to embrace. It seems that there was a measure of prejudice in his mind against the notorious sinner. Saul of Tarsus had been considered by him as a monster of iniquity and savage barbarity, and his soul recoiled from the idea of being in any degree associated with him. He distrusted the pretensions that he made as a praying soul, and spoke as if in such a breast there could not exist either mercy or sincerity. He was also evidently under the power of some natural fears respecting his own safety, and reluctant to expose himself to the peril of encountering such a fierce adversary. In all these feelings we trace the workings of unbelief; and we find them producing those effects which are their natural consequence. There were many evils veiled within these visible infirmities, for such sentiments savoured of principles, and views, in entire opposition to the Christian doctrine. Were it possible to admit that

Ananias reasoned justly, we must at once concede that Jehovah possessed not those glorious attributes which belong to his nature, such reasonings being a distrust of him as possessed of knowledge, power, grace, wisdom, or consideration for the safety of his people. It would seem that, at this moment, Ananias believed that Saul could impose, by false pretences, on the heart-searching God, that he was too great a sinner to be saved either by power or grace, and that to expose a dear child to such a peril was neither wise nor kind ; such is evidently the tendency of Ananias' answer to the divine commission. This however was temptation, and his better principles soon arose in triumph over the suggestion ; a further explanation of the eternal mind brought every natural emotion into subjection, and he readily obeyed. No scruple now remained in his soul, he accepted the testimony of God's sovereignty and grace ; and having reached the interesting scene where the penitent was pouring forth his soul to the Lord, he addressed him in language which demonstrates how well he understood the fulness of that remission of sin which is granted in the blood of Jesus. He thought not of reproach, or charges of the crimes which Saul had committed ; he spoke not of conditions to be provided by the wretched culprit ; he doubted not the truth of those affections which as a chosen vessel the Lord had wrought in him ; and when he styled him *brother*, he acknowledged all the power of the covenant, on the grace of which his own soul lived. In his address to Saul we discover the clearness and purity of his views as a believer ; for he not only admits the sovereignty of Jehovah in the choice of his subjects of mercy, but he looks to and testifies of the person of Jesus, in that interesting character so essential to the perfecting of our redemption, in styling him "that just one." This appellation was very suitable to the occasion

in which it was spoken. Saul had persecuted Jesus under the idea of his pretensions being a lie ; he had along with his murderers condemned him with malefactors ; but now his astonished and convicted mind beheld him as the true Messiah, and the Holy One ! Undoubtedly Saul's reflections at this time would very much turn upon this part of his past course and present illumination ; and therefore the address of Ananias was adapted to his state of mind. He also evinced that his affections comprehended, and appreciated, the *end* for which the Lord has chosen his people, even that they might " know his will," being chosen unto sanctification, and that they might according to Jesus' own testimony, " hear his voice." Nor was this all, Ananias also knew, that in Messiah the wrestling soul possessed a friend, who is ever ready to hear the voice that calleth upon him ; and that in the covenant sweet peace is found, in the interchange of confidential expressions of love. Whilst he urged upon Saul the belief of Jesus' person, grace, and authority, he likewise comforted him by exhorting that the voice of supplication should arise with faith and hope, and that all temptation to delay or doubt should be resisted, by prompt obedience to the vision which had opened his heart. Thus he proved that his soul was warm with the sacred fire of zeal, and charity ; he loved to exalt the character and offices of his beloved Lord ; and he longed to impart that comfort, and encouragement, to a fellow sinner, which might tend to a lively appropriation of those mercies.

In this character, it is immediately evident, that we possess an example of great Christian excellence. The most conspicuous features in it are integrity, ingenuousness, charity and zeal, all living in the midst of that mighty kingdom of grace in the heart, by which Jesus is enthroned there ; and all demonstrated in the teachable

disposition of a real convert; one, who notwithstanding the temptation (which passed like a cloud over the fair moon) shone forth again in all the lustre of that derived light, which shall for ever reflect the glory of our dear Redeemer.

We profess to have embraced the substance of those truths which are here detailed, and should prove ourselves in the many important instructions demanding our attention. We perceive by the examination of such a character as that of Ananias, how much *one* great object of faith is the centre where *all* redeemed sinners meet, whatever may be the difference of their clime, condition, or disposition. There is no difference as to the ground of acceptance and justification before God. Not only must the Ethiopian be washed in the blood of the great sacrifice, but the devout Jew must be brought to the same fountain. The grace of regeneration may be imparted at different periods, and will operate in persons of different habits, education, and dispositions; but it enters a region equally the possession of Satan by nature in all; for *all* are sentenced by the word of God as lost by original and actual sin. The *grace* is therefore the same in every instance, and the way to life but *one*; there being no remission without the sacrifice of the Just One, and no application of that sacrifice but by the Spirit's revelation of the divine person and will. Whether we have lived in awful manifestation of our departure from God, or have been engaged in exercises of devotion, yet it is equally necessary that we *see Christ*; and to every descendant of fallen Adam this exhortation is necessary "Arise," "*wash away thy sins,*" "call upon the name of the Lord."

It should be our endeavour, if the privilege of having the revelation of Jesus be given to us, to

live in the sense of this blessing, by cherishing nearness to him whom we now behold. We see that the purposes of God towards us are peculiar. He designs to give us the glorious sight of our redeeming Lord ; not in the barren and profitless confession of his name, but in the powerful discernment of the mind into his person, and that as chosen vessels unto him, we must see that just one. By faith we are empowered to contemplate him in his majesty, as the Just God ; in his grace, as the Just God and *our Saviour*. This is the vision on which we are everlastingly to gaze, when every veil and cloud shall be done away, and we shall see him as he is ; but here in this vale of tears, the privilege is ours, and the believer's eye of faith is fixed on the Holy One. Blessed is this distinction, as attended with that influence of the Spirit of sanctification, which begets in us a sanctified love of the authority of him whom we see, and by which the voice of our beloved will be as welcome to us as to Ananias of old. His commandments are not grievous, they are a law of love ; and the reconciled affections of a believer are ever standing in the waiting attitude, which marks a spirit prompt and willing to obey. This is the *true* existence of a saint ; to maintain it, we are required to use vigilance, and therefore should above all things cherish *nearness to him*. This fellowship will shed an habitual peace through the breast, and will be the means of our standing prepared for any revelation or commission which the Lord may be pleased to give. We are to consider ourselves as soldiers of the cross, under the command of our great leader. If he be pleased to put us upon dangerous services, it is *honourable* to us as a mark of his confidence, and a token of our having made some advances in experience ; and our aim should be, to live in that state of mind which *immediately*

accepts the commission, with assurance in his wisdom and protection, who has enjoined us so to serve. That a spirit of watchfulness is required we constantly perceive, by the example even of the most eminent saints, who, it is evident, are liable to assaults from the enemy of their faith. We are naturally disposed to the very evils which were excited in Ananias ; we are prone to prejudice, especially against persons who have evinced a more than ordinary malignity in their sins ; notorious, profligate, bloody persecutors, arrogant, Pharisees, are looked upon with a degree of horror, which generates a kind of distrust of the probability, that such should ever become sanctified disciples of Christ ; and even when we are informed that hopeful appearances dawn in the character, and that they have been heard to pray, we act with a caution that savours of a spirit of incredulity, and seem to doubt the fact, only because they have been such heinous offenders. It is very right to exercise prudence and a holy fear in such cases ; but we must guard against its degenerating into unbelief, and be careful that we do not, by our own indisposedness to the requirements of God respecting them, wear the appearance of those sins which were involved in the objections of Ananias. This is altogether inconsistent with our character and principles, as the followers of Jesus ; and perfectly opposed to that spirit of humility, which should keep *our own conversion* ever before us, as an example for the chief of sinners ; and we have much reason to be abased, that ever it should be possible for us thus to depart from that great fundamental doctrine, which we profess to cleave unto as our ground of hope. We may believe that these evils never appear, unless there is first in ourselves some absence of that lively recollection of our debt to Christ, which we should habitually preserve. For

what is there which will serve to establish this recollection, save only the life of communion with our beloved ; for he it is who, by his beams shining in upon the heart, keeps it soft and purified, and so preserves us in the tenderness of gracious contrition, united with grateful faith.

When sinners are brought to repentance, we should be forward to give them all the encouragement which our more experienced pilgrimage may afford. There are many anxieties and pains endured by the soul that is just emerging from darkness to light, in which we ought to sympathize. It is a period when Satan will desperately strive to retain his prisoner, when worldly connexions are all up in arms against the soul, and when many fears of what may be the result, agitate the awakened breast. We know this experimentally, having passed through the same period of conflict : and it is a grievous inconsistency, if we are backward to a work of love and affection, to those who are now in the same circumstances. Great is the privilege of being sent by the Lord to visit some praying soul, of having it in our power to speak words of instruction and comfort, of being the instruments by whom the scales of the eyes may fall off, and clearer vision be bestowed ; and we should gladly follow the example of Ananias, and tenderly greet the rescued sinner as a brother, exhorting to increase of devotion, and to persevering prayer. There can be no enjoyment more exalted or delightful to the real christian. Let us therefore cultivate charity, patience, sympathy, and so unite with the angels above, amongst whom there is joy over one sinner that repenteth. We shall also find constant opportunities for exercising the grace of brotherly love amongst the more established saints. To these let our attention be directed, that our lives may be passed in the spirit of mutual affection, receiving one another to

edification, and ministering out of the fulness that is in Christ. In this life we shall enjoy present fellowship with Jesus, and soon shall hear his voice calling us to our last abode, when we shall see him everlastingly, and dwell in the perfection of love.

PRAYER.

MOST blessed and Almighty God, we humbly ask the visitation of Thy presence, in all such revelations as sanctify and direct the soul. We bless Thee that Thou hast imparted to us the sense of Thy favour, so that we can rejoice in the eternal life that is in Christ Jesus. But when we consider how many are the privileges, and how increasing the blessed experience of Thy children, we would come to Thee for greater measures, and ask the advancing revelation of Thy love. Unveil Thyself, Thou Just One, more and more to the eyes of our faith; let us see Thee in Thy glorious person, and live upon Thee in Thy covenant offices; and O do Thou quicken our affections by every new display of Thy grace, and cause our hearts to bound at the hearing of Thy voice. Make us to know Thy will, and to love it; make us to know the mercy-seat, and to frequent it; and O may we, as Thy own blood-bought people, have an intimate fellowship with Thee, in the unfolding of our whole hearts to Thee. We desire to possess such a charity towards the poor sinners of this world, as ought to exist in hearts experimentally acquainted with *Thy* charity. Seeing we are debtors to mercy that is unbounded and unsearchable, O keep us from hardness of heart to others; defend us from all unbelief and distrust of Thy willingness and power to save, and fill us with the zealous desire of imparting to all who may

need it, the consolations which we know are ever flowing from Thee. Bless us in these efforts of zeal, and make our witness of Thee full of tenderness to the sinner, and of truth to Thy name. Forgive us, blessed Lord, in all those instances wherein we have transgressed the spirit of charity, and give us the increase of watchfulness through this humbling experience. So blessed Lord, may we abound in the life of faith, and ever glorify Thee. We pray Thee, most blessed Holy Spirit, to set up the kingdom of our dear Lord in our hearts with Thy invincible purpose. O fulfil all the good pleasure of the eternal purpose in our behalf: and in Thy promised sufficiency, make us holy, make us faithful, give us the heavenly joy. We beseech Thee to hear us and to bless us in Jesus our Lord. Amen.

TABITHA, OR DORCAS.

Acts ix. 36—41.

THE statement of character that is contained in this small portion of the word, is simple, and seems to afford so little of *history*, that it might be passed by, were not the great practical lesson exhibited through this medium, so important and comprehensive, as to yield a very fruitful source of instruction to our souls. Amidst those who professed discipleship to Christ, there was a female residing at Joppa, who was distinguished by the activity of her life, her course being one of continued exertion in behalf of the distressed. This woman fell sick and died, and the disciples, being greatly afflicted by the event, had recourse to Peter, who was then at Lydda, a place in the neighbourhood. They requested that without delay he would hasten to them, probably expecting that he might be instrumental in restoring their friend, at any rate well knowing that he was capable of administering much consolation. Peter immediately obeyed the call, and entering the house, was saluted by the sorrowing disciples, and conducted to the chamber of death. Here the bereaved widows exhibited the tokens they possessed of Tabitha's generosity and care. But Peter, putting them all forth, kneeled down, and addressed his humble supplication unto the Lord, and having received the gracious intimation that his request was heard, he bid her arise, and she opening her eyes, sat up; and he lifted her from the bed, calling the afflicted friends, and presenting her alive to their rejoicing eyes.

Little as we know of the particular history of Tabitha previously to her conversion to Christianity, her evidences as a believer in Jesus are enough to give great interest to her character, and to prove that she was one of those whom the salvation of the Lord had embraced, and separated from the ungodly world. Her faith laid hold upon the great redemption, and in that redemption she manifested that all her affections were interested, being released from the power of corruption and the love of present things, and enabled to consecrate her possessions to the service of the distressed. Thus she evinced that her understanding truly apprehended the nature of gracious operations, saw their operative tendency, and appreciated their sanctifying purposes: in this holy power of the cross, it is said of her, that she was "*full* of good works and almsdeeds which she did." These precious fruits of the Spirit did not, however, exempt her from the visitation of sickness and death; she was to encounter all those sorrows which attend the pulling down of the mortal tabernacle, and to pass through the conflict by which the soul escapes from its prison house of clay: but, no doubt, to her ransomed spirit the release would be welcome, since there is but one sentiment with saints—to them it is far better to depart and be with Christ. Her acts of charity, and laborious attention to the wants of others, had secured her the affection and gratitude of many who were aided by her labours. But it appears from the history, that the tribute which was given was more than that of gratitude for kindnesses done to the body; she was loved, esteemed, and regretted, by the *disciples*; her death was considered as a public loss; and the little flock, where she lived and ministered of her substance, mourned that so bright a light was removed from the world. We may, in consequence, reasonably conclude that Tabitha wrought her works visibly

in *faith*—was charitable *as a disciple*—and combined, with her activity the beautiful disposition of humility, and the *sympathies* of a Christian.

A peculiar honour was put upon her, when she was numbered with the few who experienced the miraculous power of the Lord, in restoring her to this mortal life. By this distinction the Lord seemed to give his own seal to the testimony of the disciples respecting her, witnessing that she was indeed a blessing lent to the earth in mercy, and to be restored as an act of long-suffering goodness from him who is Lord of life and death. She was also, by this act, constituted a living witness of the glory of the gospel, and became an object to whom sinners might be directed, as shewing forth the Lord's gracious estimation of the true disciple. If we enter into the affections of an heir of glory, we may also, in some measure, conceive of the extent to which her inward life of faith would be tried, by this will of the Lord concerning her. It must necessarily call forth the exercise of the most powerful energies of the new creation, to be rendered willing to remain a pilgrim here, after having experienced the joy of a release. However we may suppose that in such cases the Holy Ghost would obliterate the strong impressions made by the soul's visions in its separate state, there would still be the certainty that such had been the joyful deliverance, and that the pangs of death and distresses of sickness had been apparently finally encountered. To return to the clay, and again to have the prospect of languishing and dying—to have once more to meet the evils of this world, and to pass through the struggles of resisting temptation, fighting the good fight, and meeting all those distresses which are inseparable even from our dearest and best association with the objects of time, must be considered as evil in *itself* to a soul already gone beyond the reach of these ; and

there would be a necessity when the soul was restored to the body, on these occasions, for an impartation of proportionable strength, to awaken the graces of submission, contentment, and affiance. No doubt this was given, for we never hear of a regret expressed by the persons thus raised from the dead ; they would be satisfied with the divine will ; and Tabitha would return to her works of charity with the same avidity as before, and be grateful that in any way, according to the mind of the Lord, she might glorify him. He who had preserved in past days would still be her unchanging friend ; and the recurrence of those scenes, from which she had thought that her spirit had taken a last farewell, would but add greater measures to her final harvest in that world of glory, to which she was an undoubted heir.

The principal subject of improvement, which we possess in this example, is in reference to the nature of faith ; a point much to be examined, because there is nothing more generally misunderstood or calumniated : here it is richly unfolded to our view, as a divine principle, comprehensive in its holy effects. Its pure and sanctifying influence is exhibited in such lives as Tabitha's ; and herein we are made to contemplate how it ingrafts the soul into Christ, as a branch to the vine, and is instrumental to derive from him the supply of the Spirit, so as to render the believer like a fruit-bearing bough. The whole man, by this means, becomes active in every thing most pure in the sight of God, and most beneficial to the souls and bodies of men. Faith is therefore exceedingly distinguished in the word of God, being placed in the highest possible rank of the productions of the Holy Ghost, for it is the uniting instrument between Christ and the redeemed ; not only investing with all the benefits of the imputable parts of his salva-

tion, but giving an impartation out of him of a spring of obedience and hallowing grace, comprehending a love of *all* the requirements of the Lord. Wherever faith exists, it works upon the understanding, being the instrument of the Holy Ghost to reveal and unfold the nature of true Christianity; and in the same efficacy it works upon the heart, bringing all the affections into a delightful service, so that not one is left behind in the blessed work of labouring to shew forth the Saviour's praise. Hence sympathies, which were before wholly unknown, are awakened in the breast, and breaking forth in their impartial action, become sources of exceeding blessings to men. A believer thus actuated, learns the value of life, and estimates his mortal body, because hereby he can in personal exertions and labour promote various works of charity, and be spent in precious duties of faith. Thus the supernatural existence is made plain, and, as the apostle states it, "By works is faith made perfect." James ii. 22.

If this be true, what then becomes of the pretended objections advanced by the ignorant against faith? What becomes of the idle pretensions of the vain boaster and hypocrite? Or what will become of the innumerable multitude who satisfy themselves with flattering words and postponed purposes? These must all disappear, and retire in shame and confusion, before the Bible testimony of legitimate faith, which, in every instance, is an active self-denying grace, seeking occasion for good works, and accomplishing these works from motives of a sublime and abiding quality. It is very important that we possess and maintain a clear understanding upon this branch of the gospel; bearing in mind that without faith it is impossible to please God, and that by faith we become practical and zealous advocates for the glory of God, and fruitful in every good word and work. The

good works of a believer are valuable on many accounts. They are perhaps the most powerful arguments with ignorant and ungodly men, who, not being capable of entering into the principles of the saints, are most accessible through the medium of what commends itself to the senses. They are also great advantages to the real members of Christ, by affording a standing memorial of the efficacious nature of grace. They do likewise greatly tend to cheer and animate the pilgrim, for there is *in the working* a sweet sense of delight and liberty, and also a precious possession of the evidence of the Spirit's work in us, which ought not to be despised. But above all they are valuable, because they are the work of God, for it is he who worketh in us all our works of acceptable devotion or zeal, and we have to contemplate every production as highly to be estimated on account of the *Author*, and in confidence of the *end*. Jesus is to be glorified in these things, and this is sufficient to stamp an unspeakable value upon the smallest deed done in his name.

These are very animating considerations, putting every Christian upon the encouraging consideration, of how he may glorify the Lord in the lot assigned him. To females especially the subject addresses itself. There are too many, who being wholly ignorant of the enjoyments which result from relative exertion, are disposed to devote their whole time and possessions to the indulgence of self; vanity, indolence, and selfishness engross them; and if we look into the history of their days, we shall find that from the morning to the evening there is no interesting occupation to them, but what in some form gratifies self. It may be that they do not escape certain appeals made to their benevolent feelings, by those who are intent upon advancing the comforts, or education, or sal-

vation of others ; but these only give opportunity for the avowal of that hard-hearted indifference to the happiness of their fellow-creatures which disgraces their character. This indifference is indeed put under the cloak of pretended want of time, want of ability, or various hindrances ; all of which will not bear the light, for there is no truth in them. They have all those qualifications which would empower them to contribute some help, had they the inclination ; but love of dress, love of amusement, selfish gratification, and the soul-destroying idleness of their existence, are barriers to every motive which may be suggested to them for exertion. And what is the end of these idlers ? Their unprofitable life must be closed. They sicken, they die, having no memorial even of their *compassion*, no widow to lament their departure, no orphan to weep over their grave, no child of affliction to testify that they have lost a sympathising friend ! but, what is much more awful, no saints to confess that the militant church has suffered loss, or believer to mourn over a *sister* gone ! Were it possible for the soul of such an one to reanimate the lifeless clay, no doubt it would willingly return, thinking, when it is too late, that it would have been better for them had they like Tabitha, been full of good works and alms-deeds ! Let those of this description, who yet inhabit a tabernacle in which they may work, meditate upon these things ; for although there is nothing *meritorious* in the work of charity, there is a positive *requirement* of the work as a fruit of saving faith. But there are many *busy females*, who are all the day employed in useful works. They will devote much time to their needle expressly to clothe the naked—they will give their substance to help others in these works of mercy—they will attend upon sick beds, carry with them the supply of those little alleviating cordials or provisions, which the poor cannot

obtain for themselves—and have their thoughts continually bent upon devising ways whereby to aid the necessitous ! These, when they sicken and die, have many to lament their loss ; they have been so far valuable members of society, and their place is not easily supplied. We must not however conclude, that these all tread in the steps of Tabitha ; for such relative acts may be done only out of natural benevolence, or activity of disposition, without the idea once entering the mind, that in order to give essentially excellent grace to these affections, there must be *faith*, and a high motive, by which obedience to and love of God are combined in the work, and *spiritual* blessings embraced in the charities expressed to men. This accompaniment makes a vast difference, both in the quality of the work and the manner of its performance. And if we are amongst the busy workers, visitors, and nurses of this active character, we should look well to the spirit we have, and inquire if we are in fellowship with *disciples*, and like Tabitha esteemed a blessing *in the church*. There never was a period when this self-investigation could be more necessary ; for as we are in days when the female is called out into more than usual activity in concerns of this nature, and the public is full of societies, institutions, and regulations, which require the help of women, it becomes every one in a department of this kind to be closely engaged in the care of their own souls, lest they be carried away merely by the *fashion* of the day ; or imprudently heap upon themselves a multiplicity of employments beyond their ability, and leading to the neglect of their domestic avocations, and spiritual interests. To prevent this, females are advised diligently to redeem time by early rising ; conscientiously to devote a suitable proportion of that time in the *first* place to prayer and reading the Scriptures ; with order and punctual-

ity to arrange all their domestic claims ; to be furnished with some part of their work, especially if like Tabitha, engaged in making “coats and garments” for the poor, *ready prepared* for taking up in all leisure moments ; never to let one engagement encroach upon another by exhausting too much time in conversation on matters irrelevant to the business to be dispatched ; and in all the course of these duties to watch for the refreshing influence of ejaculatory prayer, which, by maintaining a sense of the divine presence in the soul, puts alacrity and humility into the service. By arranging our occupations thus, we shall escape that danger of a *hurried* state of mind into which we shall otherwise fall ; than which there is nothing more detrimental to peace or holiness. This is a course much to be pressed upon young people, who from their earliest days may be educated in the habit of *thinking for the comfort of others*. This will prove a beneficial means against the selfishness of our nature. And as these young persons mature, and obtain increase of time from being released from the necessity of so much attention to the culture of their own minds, they should be urged by Christian parents always to have *time enough* for the distressed, and ever to study, by fulness in good works and alms deeds, to manifest, that they as vessels of mercy are filled by the Holy Ghost. And whilst we all look to a record which is far above this world, expecting our life because our names are written in the *Lamb’s book*, let us not despise or undervalue the tribute which believers may give when departed to the blood-bought inheritance ; nor think it beneath us to love the grateful tribute also of the widow, the orphan, and the poor.

PRAYER.

Most blessed and gracious Lord, accept us at this time when we enter into Thy presence, in the humble hope of receiving and rejoicing in Thy manifested love ; and O do Thou draw our affections to Thy throne of mercy and grace, that we may speak to Thee out of the fulness of unfeigned faith. We are earnestly desirous of obtaining daily and momentary increase in the heavenly life ; we long to be conformed to all Thy blessed will ; and we would be consecrated to visible and decided devotion to the service of our God. O pour out upon us the unction of the Holy Ghost, that these desires may be fulfilled. Gracious God, open our understandings, and make us to comprehend the nature of faith as a supernatural grace ; teach us its value as the appointed instrument whereby Thou-art glorified in the fruitfulness of Thy saints ; and, since we profess to be branches of the living vine, cause us to experience correspondent desires to abound in fruit. We pray Thee to invigorate us for all those relative duties which belong to our continuance in this world ; and to put us upon the active discharge of whatever may manifest that we have been and are with Jesus, treading in our Master's steps, and exhibiting his mind. We would do good unto all men, especially to the household of faith ; and according to our ability would be engaged in works, by which to benefit the poor, and soothe the distresses of the afflicted. O deliver us from vanity, and idleness, and selfishness ; deliver us from the sin of occupying our precious time entirely on self ; and put it into our hearts to estimate works done in the Spirit, that we may love and emulate the example of Thy saints of old. We also pray Thee, O Lord, to

impart to us a sanctified mind in the various occupations of this description in which we may engage ; we would be preserved from all hurry or confusion, from all vain glory or love of the creature's smile, unless as that love may be sanctified in Thee. We ask Thee to enable us for our work, by giving us high and sacred motives, such as shall outlive ingratitude, fatigue, or any other evil ; and that, working in Thee our Lord as our strength, and for Thee as our guide and end, we may steadfastly persevere to the conclusion of our earthly course ; and when we die leave the savour of our active faith, as a praise to redeeming grace. Grant this, Almighty and ever faithful God, in the name of Jesus, and by the energy of the Holy Ghost, to the glory of Thy name. Amen.

CORNELIUS.

Acts x. 1—48.

IN a slight degree, we have had a view of Cornelius when we were engaged in the investigation of Peter's character ; but as this man is one of the most remarkable persons in the history of the Acts of the Apostles, we must give a more minute attention to what is related concerning him. He was the first Gentile convert received into the bosom of the Christian church, and is consequently on this account highly interesting. He was a Gentile soldier having the command of a band of men, for he was a centurion ; his circumstances therefore were those of authority, and of some worldly possessions. Although a Gentile he had embraced the true God, and renounced idolatry ; but he had not submitted to the observance of any part of the ceremonial law ; on which account he was still esteemed without the pale, by the Jews, and numbered with such as were unclean in their eyes. According to the light which he possessed, he is described as living in strict devotion of heart and life, and to have been constantly engaged in communion with God. On one of those occasions in which he was pouring forth his soul, the Lord vouchsafed to appear to him in a vision, comforting him with an assurance that he was accepted, but directing him to send to Joppa for Simon Peter, who would show him what was further requisite to his soul. Cornelius obeyed, sending two of his household servants, and a devout soldier to whom he communicated what he had seen and heard. Peter was found, as we have seen, prepared for this call by a vision which had been granted to him ;

and, accompanying these messengers, he found Cornelius waiting his arrival with some of his friends and acquaintance, whom he had gathered together to hear what Peter might have to declare. Having related to the apostle what had induced him to invite his presence under his roof, he courteously thanked him for having complied, and declared that the company before him were all assembled as in the presence of God to hear his word. In the midst of the testimony, which Peter proceeded to give, of Jesus the Saviour, the Holy Ghost descended upon the assembly, and gave the full witness and seal to the apostolic message, and to the acceptance of the Gentiles; and Peter proceeded to administer baptism. The grateful praises of this little church were offered up on high, for they spake with tongues and magnified God; and with affectionate feelings towards the Lord's ambassadors, and desires for further instruction in the gospel, they intreated Peter to tarry with them "certain days."

Cornelius is in some respects like many of those persons, whose characters we have already considered. In his dispositions as recorded here, we may trace a great similarity with what is stated of Ananias; yet, in the *circumstances* of these men, there was an entire difference. His Gentile extraction was disadvantageous, depriving him of many advantages possessed by the Jew; he had no law of ceremonies through which he might behold the great propitiation; he had no law of commandments by which he knew the mind of Jehovah; and he was destitute of many of those peculiar helps and benefits bestowed upon Abraham's race, and distinguishing that ancient brotherhood. His station as a soldier was also unfavourable to piety, exposing him to those pursuits, and that society, which savours little

of godliness; and which, in the service of the heathen must more especially have contributed to place him in a situation exceedingly unlikely to produce, or to admit serious thought, or the knowledge of the true God. Yet the matchless grace and power of the Lord passed over all these obstacles, and descending in the omnipotence of sovereign mercy rested on his soul, and blest him with regenerating grace. In what manner Cornelius became acquainted with the glory of Jehovah and the vanity of his idols, we know not; most probably he received the report of the Jewish faith with a candid and reflective mind; and, through the light reflected from that nation, was convinced that the only object suitable for a rational creature to worship was that Jehovah, whom Israel adored. This was more than the mere conviction of his judgment; his affections were interested, thereby giving the mark of regeneration. No doubt there were numbers amongst the heathen equally convinced, in understanding, of the folly of bowing down to a stock or stone, and of worshipping the creature; but Cornelius possessed, along with this, a heart touched by the eternal Spirit; and so attracted to the blessed Jehovah as the centre of his hope and love. His worship was sincere, but defective. He did not embrace the Jewish ceremonies, probably because he did not comprehend their spiritual intention. That he had heard of Jesus is evident from Peter's words; but he remained wholly unconscious of his need of this provision, and apparently totally unacquainted with every thing which belonged to *redemption*. His religion was that of humble reverence of the Almighty God; a sense of dependence upon him as a creature on the Creator; a consciousness of the need of prayer, in which he was devout; and a sense of the necessity of good works, in which he was practically

upright : for his alms-deeds are mentioned by the Lord as accepted. His zeal also is apparent ; he ordered his household as a believer, was solicitous that others should be acquainted with whatever he discovered of religious truth, and seems to have been much acknowledged by an influence over his acquaintance, and to the enlightening of some in his family. With these he seems to have lived in the habits of affection and confidence ; and, in short, to have been a man highly respectable, full of integrity, much esteemed, and delivered from the darkness and superstition of his Gentile extraction and associations. We may perhaps be almost disposed to ask, what such a man could further need, in order to constitute him a scriptural believer, did we not know how wholly devoid of all views of the only way of acceptance such worshippers may be. It is true, of Cornelius the Lord says, “ Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.” These were accepted in virtue of that intercessory kingdom which is established in Christ. Cornelius was a chosen soul, in consequence he was under peculiar divine guardianship ; it was the purpose of God to make him acquainted with salvation ; in accordance with this purpose the Holy Ghost entered upon his wonderful work in his soul ; not as in many instances immediately revealing Jesus, or the particular method by which sinners have access to God, but by first delivering him from heathenism—then working affections towards the true God—with these, infusing upright efforts to live correspondently before God and man, *reserving* further revelation for a future season. During this intermediate time, he was in a state of acceptance, because looked upon in the beloved, and regenerated by the Spirit, through whom his alms and prayers were produced and offered : the covenant prevailing by reason of the eternal

designs respecting his soul. But let us observe, it was necessary that Cornelius should *know* Jesus, otherwise there had been no occasion for the vision and commands which were given in behalf of his as yet only half instructed mind. So that as “there is no other name under heaven given amongst men whereby they must be saved, but only the name of Jesus Christ,” there is also no liberty in the Spirit or accomplishment of the purpose respecting us without the *knowledge* of him who hath called us ; see 2 Pet. i. 1—3. That the religion of Cornelius was defective will therefore manifestly appear. He was humble in the sense of unworthiness, and he threw himself upon the mercy of the true God : but he was not sufficiently sensible of the malignity of sin, he did not clearly perceive the justice of Jehovah, and in consequence he thought not of *atonement*—he looked not for *justification*, but would have been content to hope for heaven by an act of compassion from God, and to enter it as a rescued criminal. Of course therefore his *experience* was defective. He did not possess that liberty which it is the privilege of the gospel only to impart. Unlike to Ananias, he was *afraid* when the vision of the Lord appeared ; and although there is the expression of precious confidential trust in God, when he so instantly took refuge there, saying, “What is it, Lord ?” there was a want of that holy composure which a more enlarged understanding gives. We likewise discover great ignorance as to the character of the Lord’s ambassador. He had a superstitious reverence of Peter, leading him into an act abhorrent to the Christian mind, for when he saw him “he fell down at his feet and worshipped him,” and required to be corrected by the apostle, who bid him stand up, for he also was only a man like himself. These are evident marks of extreme darkness upon points of truth essential

to salvation ; and it appears also from the history that he had not even the slightest expectation of *what* he was about to hear from Peter. From this darkness however, he was graciously delivered. Through the ministry of Peter, the eternal Spirit was pleased to arise with the glorious fulness of his purpose, unveiling the person of the blessed sacrifice, and shewing to Cornelius and his friends *how* the reconciled presence of Jehovah is given to men. They then could truly speak with tongues, and magnify God in a spiritual sense, having passed from a state of regeneration into that of conversion, and exchanged the dim light of the breaking day for the glorious radiance shining in the manifested Sun of Righteousness.

This character affords one of the most striking examples of the need of Jesus Christ as revealed in the heart, and as known to be "the way, the truth, and the life." Many persons are ready to acknowledge that the figures by which the Gentile condition was represented to Peter are appropriate, since the heathen world is a region of savage, debased, and unclean principles, but they will flatter themselves that they are capable of obtaining acceptance with God because they *have a* form of worship, and act according to what they deem right. Others, who will not positively advocate the cause of gross idolators, will plead for certain persons, who living in a Christian land are free from the deeds of gross idolatry, and also according to their opinion of what is truth, worship the one God, and live in the discharge of domestic claims and works of charity. And it is not unusual to hear *Cornelius* brought forward as an example, to prove that they are accepted, although ignorant of Christ. By a proper understanding of this example however, it will appear, that he is exactly an instance of the *contrary* doctrine, for he was

not in a state of privilege such as prepared him for *eternity* until he had the revelation of Jesus, and accepted him by a confession of his name. We may indeed encourage a hope, that such persons as live in the spirit visible in Cornelius, may like him be regenerate, under the operations of the Holy Ghost, and preparing for the further light, and this should stimulate us in seeking their information ; but by no means are we warranted to depart from the simple rule of the gospel on their account, since if they die without this experience, we see not the developement of the Spirit's work, who will invariably sooner or later witness of *Jesus* to the redeemed soul, and cause that with the heart he believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth maketh confession unto salvation. We cannot, whilst destitute of the revelation of Jesus, have such views of Jehovah or of self as are required. Every subject through which we have passed shews us clearly that God is made known to man only in and by the Son. Our discoveries previously to a believing sight of Christ are obscure, even when under grace ; and the believer knows experimentally, that in proportion to his perception of Jesus, he is obtaining a gradual advancement in the understanding of the divine perfections, and in the wonder of that covenant, by which his own soul is saved. How differently do we from that period speak and think of our God ! Surely we then verify what is meant by speaking with *new* tongues ! Our heart is enlarged, our feet walk at liberty, our mouth is filled with praise, and we celebrate the name of the Lord in strains of which we had no conception before we knew God *in Christ*. Let us therefore resist every temptation to alter the method which Jehovah has prescribed for the salvation of sinners, and take heed to our hearts and words, lest we hold sentiments which are opposed to revelation.

Let us watch lest in the pretence of *charity*, or by the influence of *indolence* we shut up the anxious question which respects the safety of our fellow sinners, in the vain and undefined hope that after all they may be preserved, notwithstanding their ignorance of Jesus the Saviour. Jesus himself has said, "No man cometh to the Father but by me."

We have great instruction afforded us by the example of Cornelius, both as it respects our progressive growth in the heavenly life, and the relative manifestations of our grace, which we should exhibit both to the church and to the world. Whatever be the proportion of our light, we must with integrity walk accordingly, otherwise we are not possessed of any evidence which can yield us comfort, for whatever may be the measure of our ignorance, yet if we are upright, we shall not fail to seek *consistency*. The Holy Spirit always protects his own blessed work, even in its most infant state, by imputing this attendant disposition of integrity. And it is very interesting to observe how much this character belongs to such as are under *regenerating* grace. We know that there is one God; this must constrain us to renounce our idols, and to give him the sacrifice of our hearts, and tribute of our tongues. We know that prayer should be attended with real devotion of spirit; this should put us upon watching our hearts, when engaged in the exercise, that we may be *devout*. We know that our fellow-creatures have immortal souls: this should awaken the affections of charity and zeal towards them, putting us upon imparting what helps it may be ours to afford. We know that the Lord uses instruments to the furtherance of our own souls in the knowledge of truth: this should fill us with a high estimation of his ambassadors; but as they are only his instruments, and are men of like

passions with ourselves, we should remember that our affections are to have a limit, and our expectations look through the creature to the blessed Creator. There are evident parts of *consistency* to which we must necessarily attend if we are upright. But, blessed be the Lord, many of us know something more than this, and have been advanced into the experience of those peculiar blessings which belong to redemption ; we know the shepherd's voice, and have heard of the all-atoning sacrifice ; on us therefore a responsibility rests, which we must answer correspondently with our privilege, otherwise our integrity must stand impeached. If we are in these circumstances, let us gratefully accept our high distinction, and demonstrate our sense of the Lord's loving mercy, by extolling him with new tongues, and shewing forth what we now feel so gladdening to our souls. Blest by the invigorating discoveries of grace flowing from a crucified Redeemer, and elevated into liberty by the appropriation of a righteousness answerable to every divine requirement, we should tell of the wonders of salvation with joyful lips, and "magnify God." This will be well-pleasing in his ears, and tend to the rapid increase of all heavenly consolation in our own hearts.

A soul under such influences will not only imitate the example of Cornelius respecting his household, but if possible, will exceed it. The selfishness and pride of nature being subdued, the best interests of the lowest domestic in the dwelling will be affectionately promoted. Courtesy and kindness of speech and manner will be accompanied with free communication upon spiritual topics : the divine revelation will be a theme on which the master will discourse with the servant ; and if he be blest by having a "*devout*" attendant, he will the more freely speak of the things of experi-

ence, and distinguish him by confiding his views for the furtherance of the kingdom of the Lord to him, so far as he is capable of uniting in the endeavour. Along with these affections, the heart will be open to consult for the interests of men, so as to invite them to hear, affording them opportunities to meet with eminent saints under their roof, and seeking to diffuse a reverential recollection of the presence of the Lord in their little assemblies. On these occasions many spiritual blessings are frequently abundantly shed forth; the Holy Ghost witnesses to the covenant love that is in Jesus, and souls are refreshed and edified in the renewed baptism from him. These then are high and blissful distinctions,—shall we not aspire after them? and will it not prove an abundant source of all joy and peace in believing, thus to live in fellowship with the comforter, and in friendship with our God in Christ? O let us bring our lives before the mercy-seat, thus to be consecrated and owned in the eternal God.

PRAIER.

MOST blessed and gracious Lord, animate our souls, we meekly beseech Thee in the way of peace, and give us the visitations of love and life in which Thou art glorified. O may our affections glow with sacred devotion, and all our desires centre in Thee. Give us, blessed Lord, the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, and bring us into the blissful vision of Thy presence; and O grant that in all things we may be manifestly Thine, built up in the covenant, and joyful in our God. O Saviour, extend Thy loving mercy to our souls; refresh us with Thy blessing, keep us in the sanctified possession of our privileges, and make us consistent with what we possess and profess. We would be



found uprightly living according to the light we have received, and glorifying Thee by the surrender of our affections to Thy service ; and whatever may be our condition or degree of knowledge, we earnestly long to devote the whole to Thee. Be pleased to call forth our affections according to the circumstances in which we are placed, that we may endeavour to make known to all around us the efficacy of Thy purposes of love to men. We trust that Thou wilt acknowledge our efforts to the persuasion of some poor sinners, and that we may be blest in winning them from idols to Thee the living God ; and we would ever be looking for Thy blessing upon our work of love. O let us be a savour of life unto life, testifying acceptably of Jesus the everlasting Lord ; and bless us by raising up examples of Thy power under our witness of Thee. May our household be hallowed to Thy name, may we possess those under our roof, who devoutly worship Thee, and may we receive all in the bonds of Jesus with a brother's heart. Teach us to cultivate and exhibit the tender and sympathetic deportment which flows from fellowship with Thyself ; and may our manner and speech always be replenished with the spirit of our dear Redeemer. We bless Thee that in our family circle, and in the social assemblies wherein we have met in Thy name, we have experienced Thy presence, and been comforted by the Holy Ghost : for all these occasions accept our grateful praise, and continue, O Lord, to visit us thus, we pray Thee, in all the means of grace, that we may be baptised by the eternal Spirit, in all his illuminating and establishing power. We offer these supplications, blessed Lord, trusting in Thy unsearchable mercies and unchanging love. Amen.

HEROD AGRIPPA.

Acts xii. 1—6. 19—23.

HEROD surnamed Agrippa was grandson to Herod the Great, and nephew to that Herod who murdered John Baptist; he was also brother to Herodias. Josephus informs us, that his own father dying whilst he was an infant, the care of his education was taken by his grandfather; and that at an early period he was by him sent to the court of Rome, that he might there pursue his earthly career, and seek promotion. Here he was received with favour, and gave himself to the cultivation of those manners which he deemed most likely to ingratiate him with the ruling powers. His conduct however was marked by extravagance and profusion, and he soon became greatly involved in debt; so much so, as to be unwilling to expose his affairs or to come under the rebuke of his grandfather. An order being issued for the temporary withdrawal of such as had been by the dying bed of Drusus the Emperor's son, and Herod being one of this number, he, instead of returning home, retired to Massada; where Herod Antipas his uncle afforded him assistance; and in process of time he returned to Rome. There he remained gradually advancing in favour, but particularly attaching himself to Caius; on which account he fell under suspicion, and Tiberius the Emperor cast him into prison. The Emperor dying, and Caius coming to the throne, Herod was released and loaded with honours, and soon afterwards was made king of Judea. In consequence of this appointment, he came into that region that he might exercise the government; which he discharged with much

satisfaction to the Jews, giving himself continually to promote their wishes, and to afford them pleasure. We are introduced to this man in Acts xii. l. as connected with the history of the church of Christ, and here his natural character assumes a visible form, which ranks him amongst the most vile. He became a bloody persecutor, stretching forth his hand to *vex* the disciples of Jesus, ordering the execution of James the brother of John, and proceeding to put Peter in prison, intending after the passover to kill him also. We have, in the life of Peter, considered the miraculous deliverance which the Lord effected in his behalf; and we further read, how Herod, being informed of Peter's escape, commanded that his keepers should be put to death; and he leaving Jerusalem went down to Cesarea. Here he was probably engaged in preparations for war with the Sidonians and Tyrians; but these being wholly dependant upon Judea for provisions, sued for peace; and through the influence of Blastus the King's chamberlain, succeeded in their treaty. Upon this occasion Herod made a public oration, for which he received from the multitude shouts of applause, and an ascription of divine honour which he blasphemously admitted; for which crime the immediate vengeance of the Lord fell upon him. The divine judgment smote him, rendering him in the midst of his fancied glory a wretched spectacle to men. Josephus tells us that he was instantly seized by excruciating tortures of the most horrible description, under which he remained five days, and then expired. The word of God describes part of the dreadful visitation, telling us that, before the separation of his body and soul, he suffered the dreadful sentence of being "eaten of worms," and that he was thus made an awful monument of the divine judgment.

How affecting are such examples of the vanity and unprofitableness of earthly grandeur, and pomp, and state ! How fleeting were all the enjoyments which this votary to pleasure and the world was able to grasp ! And how awful is the constant manifestation of human depravity which through these mediums is presented to our view ! In Herod the commission of such offences as are chargeable on his character, gathers malignity above what we behold in men who from their circumstances are totally ignorant of revelation. This was not the case with his corrupt mind, for he possessed religious advantages, so far as that he descended from ancestors proselyted to the Jewish faith, he was brought up in the observance of the services of religion enjoined by that faith, and he had the power of access to the Scriptures, and of acquaintance with the wonderful displays of divine glory in the history of Israel. It is also evident that he admitted those obligations which the Jews professed, and that in the latter part of his life especially, he endeavoured to display the feelings of a zealot intent upon propagating his own religious tenets. These were external advantages ; and as they were abused and made subservient to his carnal projects ; they became aggravations of his guilt. It is true his education was by no means favourable to any spiritual or just views of religion ; his relative connections, although proselyted to Judaism, were not raised out of their bondage to Satan, and that bondage was also in them peculiarly demonstrated in positive and desperate crimes. He was taught from a child that worldly glories were to be the object of his ambition, that to promote his own exaltation, he must cultivate whatever would recommend him to men, that he must have no scruple in serving at the court of the heathen, and must make himself agreeable to men of every description and sentiment. This educa-

tion found in him an apt scholar ; and Herod willingly embraced views that so entirely corresponded with his own inclinations. He therefore speedily became an accomplished courtier, and pushed his way with insinuating address, through the various scenes in which he moved. He possessed in his natural disposition those qualifications which usually ensure admirers and adherents. His manners were affable and courteous ; his habits were such as his dependents would deem generous and liberal ; his squandered money, ready smiles, love of pleasure, and a certain description of ardor and affection especially expressed towards his benefactors, were all great recommendations, and rendered him just such an one as the world might love as its own. And were our views of his character confined to the transactions recorded of his course as a man of pleasure or a courtier at Rome, we might be induced to rank him amongst the more amiable of natural men. Herod is however stripped of this veil by the divine record. By a *spiritual* judgment we shall discern, that even his most attractive qualities were devoid of any thing essentially estimable. He was under the dominion of worldly principles, he was destitute of the knowledge or love of God, he was in bondage to self and the hopes of high attainments in the earth ; and in his apparent generosity there was a total absence of justice, his liberality being expressed in *self-seeking*, and beyond the capability of his finances to support. In his more matured days, his spirit and pursuits assumed a greater degree of ostentation, vanity, and severity. We can only account for the unprovoked aggression he committed against the Christians by the principles of an earthworm growing old in love of all that is fleshly and carnal. He received no offence from the saints, excepting only what was occasioned by their holiness, and wantonly trifled with their peace, shed

their blood, and pleased himself in their destruction. Along with the native enmity of his heart, there was another passion in his breast which was gratified by these bloody persecutions ; he saw that it pleased the Jews, and his idolatrous love of human smiles and popularity found out a source of gratification by this means. He also evinced savage and irrational passions, when he not only resisted the miracle wrought for Peter, but vented his disappointed malice upon men, who he had reason to believe would gladly have obeyed his most cruel mandate against the Christian sufferer, had it been in their power. But in these instances he was deaf to the voice of justice or humanity ; and having issued his decree, passed on in unfeeling pride of heart to the discharge of his worldly duties. He was ripening for his own destruction. Having dared to put forth his impious hand against the spiritual Temple, the household of faith, he stirred up a mighty tempest against his own soul ; and at the moment when he left Jerusalem with a mind inflated by pride, and haughtily indignant at disappointment, he was entering upon the last precipice down which he was speedily to be hurled in righteous vengeance. His last act of impious presumption was the completion of his cup of provocation in this world. The vain pageantry which he displayed, his self-complacent pleasure in the adulation of men, were evils of no trifling degree ; but when they advanced to the daring extent of aiming at, or allowing from men, tributes which infringed upon the prerogatives of Jehovah as the only God, he brought upon himself the full weight of the curse ;—by the blasting of the Almighty, being made to feel his impotence—his contemptible attempts at independency!—and in this awful woe exhibiting the horrible condition of a reprobate ; for whilst, as history informs us, rolling on the ground in agony, and uttering shrieks of an-

guish, no cry for mercy escaped his lips, no word of repentance or faith was wrung from his heart—a fearful demonstration that he was given up to the second death !

How dreadful are the consequences of that corruption of our nature, which has made the sinner's heart a soil prolific of every thing that is abominable and accursed. Not only have we *lost* all good by being cut off from the fellowship of the Spirit, but we remain given up into the possession of those hateful passions which are the unquestionable marks of our fellowship with hell. Perhaps these reflections come upon us with greater weight, when we trace the existence of sin, and its progressive increase, in characters of whom the *world* would give a more favourable report : and at all times it is profitable for us to select such characters for our study of human nature, because we shall more clearly discover in them the *nature* of a *fallen* creature,—how his very amiabilities are held in a region of spiritual death, and how his mildest career is capable of being stained with ferocious deeds, when once passion is excited and pride meets a blow. By these reflections we are led into the sense of those evils which fill our own breast ; for we speedily learn that our propensities are like our fellow-sinners'—to earth, to objects of sense, to ambition after pleasure, influence, or rule. These we have *felt*, and cannot deny their existence within us, and these we have on various occasions evinced, feeling at the same time movements of deep mortification, when our favourite projects have been thwarted and overthrown. If such be the consciousness we have of similarity to the character of Herod, why are we not to admit that we have a capability of ripening to the same measure which he attained ? Sin is always progressive, and as it makes its advances, it always establishes

its rule with an increased degree of hardness and insensibility, so that the *danger* is also proportionably advanced by so much more of indifference to the evil and to the consequences of sin. If we have been living amidst fostered schemes for present ease, wealth, or favour,—if we have been squandering our possessions for the object of securing our own popularity or aggrandisement,—we shall of course be more jealous of what we may have obtained ; or view the approach of an enemy to our possessions with corresponding excitements of heart. What then shall hinder our advancing into the same final deeds which *shock* us when contemplated in Herod, but which may be, at this moment, insidiously making their way in our own hearts ? One great object towards the prevention of these evils is obtained, if once we are thoroughly persuaded of our individual depravity of nature, the deceitful workings of sin, and the necessity of being placed under a dispensation of holy discipline. But we must proceed further than this, and understand that nothing short of the Spirit's work within us will introduce the antidote to our present and future alienation from God. The example of Herod may convince us that no professed rule of judgment in religion or practice, however founded upon divine institutions and laws, will produce an accordance of mind and conduct with the divine requirement, unless it be animated by *the Life*—the Lord from heaven. It is to the possession of the indwelling God that we owe our victory over sin, and every measure of conformity with the revelation of truth. And when he so abides within us, he will produce that *spiritual* discernment which gives a sight of God, of sin, and of personal responsibility, leading to love of God, hatred of sin, personal activity in the Lord's service, a blessed new existence, which will be attended with full conviction of the irreconcilableness of the world and Christ, of the

pursuit of present rest with the experience of hope in the future ; and that if any man will have peace or prosperity, he must seek it in a *decided* acceptance of the cross. It is to these high objects of faith that the upright will aspire : short of these we are exactly in the same ruinous circumstances as Herod, and have no security against the foulest proposals of sin and Satan.

Let the example of Herod be a warning to those who are inclined to *vex* the church of Christ or any of his humble followers. It were better for a man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the depths of the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. He who tenderly cherishes his beloved flock, may suffer them to be tried, in order to demonstrate their excellence ; but he will arise and punish all those who have so ventured to trouble his inheritance. There are persons in almost every society, rank, and family, who have no hesitation in vexing the more seriously disposed around them, by raillery, scorn, and insulting expressions, impediments thrown in their way, and stumbling-blocks placed before them over which they hope to see them fall. Let such beware—they are moving God to jealousy, and his blasting storm may be ready to come down. Let such consider how they are already possessed of a persecutor's spirit, and that it may end in their becoming murderers of the saints. And let them consider what that cry is that ascends for ever before the throne, uttered from the blood of the holy ones, and invoking the avenging purpose of the Lord.

Let this example speak also to all whose vain-glorious passions domineer in their souls ; and let them take heed lest their sins assume the daring form of direct rivalry of God. He has an awful power of visiting all such with a preying worm feeding upon the very vitals, and consuming all

enjoyment in life, wasting all talent, and introducing the anticipation of the never-dying worm in the bottomless pit; many times giving up the sinner in this world to unspeakable tortures of mind and body, from which no human possessions can deliver; and finally consigning him to the region where he meets the full recompense of his sins. Let our meditations at this time be serious, humble, and deeply impressed with the necessity of seeking refuge in the comprehensive salvation of Christ.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we supplicate for the revelation of peace in Thy dear Son, and for the witness of our interest in salvation by the Holy Ghost: and now, with prostrate affections that solicit Thy notice, we ask Thee to admit them to rest in Thee, we bend our knee before Thy throne, and call upon Thee to hear. Our vileness and sin we lament and bewail with unfeigned humiliation, confessing that we are wholly abominable, and that we deserve nothing from Thee but rebuke. We do not come to plead for Thy gifts on any ground of desert, or with any plea of excuse for our trespasses: O gracious God, we have none to bring, but are utterly undone. Consider us, we pray Thee, in the salvation that has been wrought out so gloriously by Jesus Christ the righteous; and O may we experience the fulness of his work applied to our own necessities with power. Sprinkle us, dearest Lord, by Thy most precious blood, which cleanseth from all sin, and which appeaseth the troubled conscience; and O save us from those ravages which the destroying worm of self-accusation or dread of future woe produce in sinners that are ignorant of Thee. We confess that our hearts are as full of provocation as the worst of sinners,

and that our lives have been a scene of terrible provocation to Thee: but mercy abounds, and through the sacrifice of the blessed Surety may cover our transgression and blot out our sin. For these mercies we urge upon Thee our unfeigned cry; we call upon Thee in the name of our Advocate and Friend; O send us not empty away—dismiss us not without the grant of our request; but make us, O Saviour, Thy own acknowledged saints. We would prefer to be amongst the persecuted rather than the persecutors. Thy strength is the never-failing defence and support of Thy suffering people. O increase our faith and enable us to live upon the promise of Thy momentary help, with a simplicity of child-like confidence, consistent with our relation to Thee. Come, blessed Lord, shed into our hearts these peaceful pledges of Thy love, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

JOHN MARK.

Acts xii. 12. xiii. 13. xv. 37—39.

THERE are many interesting particulars belonging to the character of John Mark, which may be rendered very profitable to our souls. He is first mentioned in his relative connection with the saints of Christ, in which he was highly favoured. His mother's house was evidently the retreat of the afflicted servants of the Lord, and the habitation of prayer ; his uncle Barnabas was numbered amongst the most faithful disciples ; and he appears to have been trained up under every aid which could be administered through Christian means. At the time when Paul and Barnabas left Jerusalem to prosecute their labours, Mark was chosen by mutual consent as a companion and assistant to them ; no doubt with the intention also of training him up for usefulness, by introducing him into opportunities for obtaining experience in the gospel. In these missionary travels, however, Mark did not long remain unshaken ; for when about to sail into regions where increased peril awaited them, he left his friends and returned to Jerusalem. Acts xiii. 13. Here he continued ; and we read of him again in Acts xv. 37—39, where Barnabas was desirous of making another trial of his steadfastness, and Paul was determined in his rejection of him. Barnabas, as we have seen, separated on this account from Paul, and took his journey with Mark. In this second surrender of himself to the service of Christ he proved faithful, and is frequently mentioned afterwards with much approbation in the church ; and by Paul in terms of strong estimation and love. When writing to

the Colossians (iv. 10, 11), he carefully reverses the charge which he had before given them respecting him, and enjoins, that if he should now visit them, he should be received. When writing to Timothy, 2 Tim. iv. 11, he desires that Mark may be brought unto him as *profitable* to him in the ministry. And to Philemon he mentions him as greeting the saints with affection. Peter also takes notice of Mark with a strong testimony, 1 Pet. v. 13, where he calls him his *son*. It is probable Peter had been useful to him in the determination of his principles ; and it is usually supposed, that Mark wrote his Gospel in association with and by the direction of Peter. In these particulars Mark appears before us with great interest, and presents us with much important instruction.

The character of this young man is such as we not unfrequently meet with in the course of the Christian history. He was one of those who possessed what we call many hopeful dispositions, which rendered his friends and family sanguine in their expectations respecting him. He was probably very young at the time when he is first mentioned, and had been brought up (although by birth a Jew) in the Christian faith. Under these advantages he professed and probably felt much of mental and of heart affection to the cause of Christ ; we can scarcely suppose that he would have been chosen, as he was by Paul and Barnabas, unless he had evinced these favourable dispositions. Mark however had little experience. What he had beheld, in the Christian profession, was the reflection of its loveliness in the spirit of those around him ; he saw it to be a blessed faith, sanctifying the affections, and imparting peace. He believed it to accord with prophecy, and to be the evident substance of the divine promises made to Abraham and the fathers ; and he estimated the

revelation as altogether blessed and true. It was comparatively easy for him to make confession of this faith, as a child brought up and educated under its genial influence ; and as easy for him to suppose that he devotedly loved the name on which he called, and could endure hardship with others in the Gospel. Under his mother's roof he heard indeed the sound of the blowing tempest that was stirred up against the faithful, but he felt not the blast, and was little aware of the nature of those self-denying circumstances in which public advocates for truth were necessarily placed. The personal experience of hardship and exposure proved too much for him, and cowardly fears seized upon his soul when he contemplated the storms before him. This was a grievous circumstance, not only as it respected his own case, but as it concerned the church ; because the fears of his heart were not so repressed or subdued, as to be kept within the bounds of his own experience, but were betrayed by an open departure which was dishonourable to the profession, and gave opportunity for the enemies of the gospel to blaspheme. The grief and disappointment of all those connected with him must have been great ; and we may judge of the extent of Paul's mortification and sorrow on this account, by the strong feelings he expressed both to Barnabas and, as it seems, in warnings to the Colossians.

The riches of divine grace triumphed in behalf of his soul. Mark was recovered ; but we may conclude not without painful and bitter conflict. His return to the house of his mother was with shame, and no doubt with distress ; however kindly maternal love would welcome him, his own heart must have been convicted of having acted unworthily ; and probably his bosom was a stranger to peace, until the power of gracious principles was demonstrated in a renewed consecration to the

cross. The mercy of the Lord is conspicuous in the mighty grace which assuaged the anguish of his soul, by imparting not only the blessed operation of the heavenly comforter, but by affording him also the sympathy and help of human means. If, as we suppose, *Peter* was the chosen instrument of conveying comfort and instruction to Mark, we may perceive a peculiarly merciful appointment. Peter was prepared, by his own former afflictive condition as a deserter, to pity and sympathise with this brother in distress ; he could enter into the nature of his griefs ; know what alone could heal the wound, and point him to the unchangeable love of Jesus with a father's sympathetic tenderness. Here we may also observe, that it is remarkable how Mark particularly records Peter's repentance on the occasion of his having denied his Lord, showing an interesting unison of feeling in the two disciples, who were ready to confess with all self-abasement the aggravated nature of their offence, and so to exhibit the bounty of that loving Redeemer who can so freely forgive.

The consistency of Mark after the restoration of his soul is scripturally evident. The record gives us a faithful view of his *laborious* return to duty, in which he also manifested those precious affections which always accompany true penitence. Notwithstanding the severity with which Paul had treated him, and the suspicion he had entertained of his sincerity, he felt nothing towards that apostle but reverence, love, and estimation ; he justified his censure and doubt of him, knowing that he had given reason for both ; and so far from feeling any resentment, or distance, in consequence, he affectionately laboured with him in the ministry, to the comfort of the Apostle, to the advancement of the kingdom, and in a faithful fellowship with him in sufferings. These are traits of the excellent grace of repentance, humility, and zeal

being abundantly conspicuous ! Our gracious Lord has thus distinguished Mark by powerful evidences of a true return to his bosom, and was pleased to confer on him the further privilege of being an instrument of edification and comfort to the church in all ages, by constituting him one of those inspired witnesses through whose pen the history of our beloved Lord is given to the world. In the course of his gospel we trace the existence of his own peace of mind, since he writes in the full vigour of one enabled to testify of the fulness of redemption, and there is a touching simplicity in his style that is exceedingly affecting to the Christian heart.

The point of instruction, which seems most immediately to strike upon our attention in this history is the evident necessity of having *experience* in the things of Christ ; without which we are not prepared for those scenes which in every age of the world await the true disciple ; and which will always have a measure of trial annexed to them. It is undoubtedly a great advantage to young people when they are trained up with eminent disciples. To have a mother whose heart is the Lord's, and under whose roof the soul is matured by perpetual manifestation of the life of faith—to have near relatives and connections occupying eminent posts for Christ, and into whose society the youthful hearer is continually brought, and to hear and receive testimonies which decidedly exalt a crucified Saviour, and show him to be to his people all in all, are so many *blessings* of unspeakable value. And they are generally attended with certain visible effects, even when there is not decided conversion of soul. A young person thus situated obtains *knowledge* ; and this is a blessing so far as it proves a preservative against many destructive errors propagated by sinners in the

world. They are also frequently under moral restraints, which keep them from running into those excesses which plunge thousands into every species of rebellion ; this is a mercy, since it lessens the accumulation of guilt upon the head, and renders the individual's course less pestilential than that of the unrestrained sinner. But in many instances these advantages are attended with abiding and spiritual blessings, the Lord smiling upon the use of means, and descending upon the young mind and heart with nurturing and maturing visitations of the Spirit. Yet even when this latter privilege is bestowed, it is not enough that the disciple be really a lover of Jesus and the cause ; he must be *tried*, and brought into situations where his early advantages may be rendered practically beneficial, and his awakened affections be diffusive in their influence. It is needful to have *self-knowledge*, to have an understanding of the nature of the *Spirit's* operations, and to possess experimental humility and dependance in consequence of this discernment. These are usually not much realized during the disciple's abode in the *nursery* of his Christian education ; and frequently when called out by more advancing years into a degree of publicity, or placed in the circumstances of having to encounter the world, the scene becomes appalling, or reveals a condition and experience belonging to the soul, that was not conceived or expected previously to the trial. It does not necessarily follow that the young disciple shall *yield* to his fears, or that the experience he is obtaining of his own heart must be learnt by the steps so culpable in Mark, but the truth is, that we should urge upon such persons to reflect upon this part of the Christian profession, and affectionately watch for them when they are about to launch into the affairs of this life. More particularly we have to exhort them not rashly to adventure into situations of

great responsibility when under the first impulse of feeling, but to seek *experience* in the first place, that they may have a better prospect of discharging them in Christian steadfastness. It frequently occurs that young people under these impressions whilst *at home* have very ardent imaginations respecting the *work* of the gospel; they contemplate the life of a missionary, they think of the interesting schools where the savage mind is brought under the mild influence of gospel lessons, they read the reports of such scenes until an enthusiastic fire burns in their breast; or, they look upon the ministry, count it a high and blissful appointment, and sigh for the privilege of thus testifying of Jesus. The emotion is probably *sincere*; but there is no experience; and if such persons are put upon the trial, they too often prove like John Mark, and return back to their home disheartened and depressed. It is not that they were wholly uninstructed as to the inconveniences which must be encountered in such a course, but these they bounded over in their imagination as not worthy a thought, or as to fall before the fervour of their devoted hearts. Affectionate and sanguine friends will often encourage these expectations, and by the force of their own zeal and love to the disciple will be disposed to urge them forward in their hopes. A life of this description however is soon found to be replenished with difficulties, not to be encountered successfully without such self-knowledge as produces self-emptiness, and such self-emptiness as leads to simple reliance on the Lord. Mortifications, disappointments, hinderances, lie at the *threshold* of this way: even if these are overcome, there lies beyond them fatigue, scorn, hardships—probably bodily sufferings, privations, contradictions from sinners' ingratitude, and frequent disappointment to the exertions that are made, and innumerable difficulties, all of which call for self-

denial, and will occasion surprise, discomposure, departing away, and many grievous inconsistencies, if rashly entered without spiritual experience. Consistency in works of this description will call forth peculiar affection, which must be cherished in holy fellowship with the Lord; for it is necessary to have supreme love for Christ, and unconquerable love for the souls of men; otherwise we shall be speedily overcome by trial and desponding in our way.

But it is not only in the work which particularly concerns the souls of others that we need the existence of these dispositions; our own pilgrimage, however comparatively retired and private, calls for the life of vigilance, and will need the use of experience. Alas, we are all disposed to run on in our Christian course without sufficiently reflecting, or looking into the movements of our own heart. And particularly we may observe, in young beginners, how many imprudences, rash expressions, and high sounding pretensions escape them, which maturer days will correct, and which evidently arise from inexperience. All this should teach us mercy to them and vigilance to ourselves, and should impress upon those young people who are liable to these dangers, and setting out in their pilgrimage, the evident weakness of nature, and the positive need of receiving for every moment of the spiritual journey strength from the Lord. It is a great blessing to be preserved from backsliding, and from every act which might bring dishonour upon the cause; this should stimulate us to reflection, prayer, and dependence. It is impossible we should go back in our profession without suffering consequent loss; and the anguish of having grieved the Spirit, or of having caused disappointment to the servants of Christ, is of so grievous a nature, that to be spared the conflict should be the subject of our unfeigned desire.

Let us not close this subject without a grateful reflection upon the amazing grace of the covenant, which so abundantly recovers the wanderer, and has provided such promises of mercy to the backslider when he returns to his God, as leave no room for despair in the broken heart. The voice of eternal love is ever sounding in the ear of the penitent, inviting him once more to make trial of a Saviour's grace, and engaging to bury every offence in eternal compassion. Such an example as that of Mark is a testimony to the truth of these promises, and exhibits the loving-kindness of the Lord in unquestionable characters. And it will be a joy to the upright to know also, how in returning to the Saviour's bosom new strength is found, so that the future course becomes increasingly laborious, more abundantly humble, charitable, and sympathetic, rendering the soul that heretofore occasioned grief to the faithful a comfort and joy in the church. Our own hearts should be affected correspondently with the particular state that we may be in. If we are defiled by the sin of unfaithfulness, we should reflect upon its malignity, abhor ourselves, and return to the Lord. If we are moaning under the depressing sense of this sin, we should read the promises of God to cases like ours, put forth faith in the revelation, and come to him, with all our misery, as to a compassionate helper and friend. If we are amongst the steadfast, our humility should abound, for we stand by grace. And whilst we are faithful to mark the conduct of such as dishonour the cause, by a resolute separation from them during their departure, we should discriminate, and be ready to restore the penitent, encouraging the first indication of a heart that would still surrender itself to the Lord. And we, as sinners saved by the unchangeableness of the covenant in Christ, should all unite in exalting our great Deliverer,

praising him as the Fountain of all our consolations and hopes.

PRAYER.

BLESSED and eternal Lord and Saviour, accept the efforts of our hearts and minds to celebrate Thy matchless name, and be pleased to bring us into that state of communion with Thyself, which answers to the idea of walking with Thee. We, O Lord, are poor, weak, and helpless, so that if left alone we fall, and, but for Thy sustaining and recovering grace, must perish everlastingly. Our wants are many, our defilements are great, and in too many instances we have contracted the sin of unfaithfulness to Thee. These evils, O Lord, we lament and confess with unfeigned sorrow and penitence of soul. In the midst of our conscious grief we would still offer a tribute of praise. Wretched as we are in ourselves, Thou hast not despised, neither hast Thou condemned us as our sins deserve. Great is Thy faithfulness to Thy own promises, and wonderful is Thy wisdom and grace, by which Thy promises are established in a covenant head. For these things we bless Thee, and, in confidence of their never-ceasing virtue, we return to Thee again and again. O be pleased, Lord, to affect our hearts with that ingenuous and grateful feeling, which becomes children so fostered, fed, and upheld. And in Thy own blessed operations establish within us the holy principles which belong to adoption and peace with Thee. We pray to be strengthened against all human fears, and to be kept in a state of dependance upon Thy encompassing defence, so that whatever may be the perils threatening us as Thy disciples, we may not yield to cowardly terrors, nor lose sight of Thy presence, which is a sure defence. Thou

art able and willing to keep us—Thou canst defend us in the very fires ; and if we are appointed to suffer, we know that Thou wilt give strength for the day. O make these thoughts abiding and practical to the deliverance of the inward man from all anxieties and reasonings of the flesh. Look with compassion, blessed Shepherd, upon those young people who are called from their earliest days to the knowledge of Thy name, and be pleased to awaken in them a sense of their dependence, and a desire to enter upon pilgrimage with a discerning and humble mind. And O strengthen their perceptions in the divine life, and build them up to be able witnesses of Thy truth. Let no temptations cast down their souls, but cause them to triumph, knowing that Thou carriest the lambs in Thy bosom, and will keep Thy own. Lord, hear and bless us, for Thy mercies' sake. Amen.

ELYMAS.

Acts xiii. 6—11.

WE have traced the progress of the Apostle Paul, as he passed through the various regions to which his missionary life led him, and in these travels have seen how many and varied were the characters, with whom he was in different ways brought into connection. In the Isle of Cyprus, he met with two persons of very opposite minds ; to one of whom we now direct our inquiry. Elymas is described as a Jew by birth ; he was probably by profession also an Israelite, since he exercised a professed prophetic office ; in which however he was *false*. He is described as a sorcerer, and it is evident, used his pretensions to the gift of prophecy as a cloak to his corrupt designs. At the time in which he is introduced to our notice, he was in company with Sergius Paulus, the deputy of the country, over whom he was endeavouring to establish his influence ; but this man, ere he admitted his claims, determined to make further investigation into what is truth ; and Paul and Barnabas arriving at that moment in the island, he sent for them, desiring to hear what they proposed as requisite to be believed. Such a circumstance was destructive to the hopes of Elymas, who, being alarmed and irritated by the testimony of these Ambassadors of the Lord, resolutely endeavoured to dissuade the deputy from attending to them, and with great effrontery withstood the words of their mouth. Paul being filled with divine influence, instantly fixed his eyes upon him, and in words of awful denunciation, pronounced him an accursed enemy of truth, exposed

his character and iniquity, and proceeded as the Lord's ambassador, to inflict upon him the sentence by which he was deprived of sight; so that he went out from the presence of the deputy, seeking some one to lead him by the hand. What further became of this miserable man, we know not by any scriptural authority: but it is evident, that by this judgment a triumph was given to the gospel of Jesus, and that it pleased the Lord to constitute Elymas a standing monument of the impotency of human enmity and satanic malice, when leagued against a cause which must stand in the omnipotent purpose of the eternal mind.

The sin of Elymas was monstrous, and aggravated by every consideration which can give malignity to the character of transgression. His privilege as a Jew rendered his determined confederacy with Satan more dreadful, since he was by education fully aware of the condemnation to which he thus exposed his own soul, and to the desperate breach of every solemn requirement of truth to which he thus surrendered himself. He knew that Jehovah, the great and terrible God, is the Almighty Ruler, and able and determined in punishing his resolute opposers; he knew that Satan is a fallen spirit, already groaning under the endurance of divine vengeance; he knew that in an especial manner, Jehovah had prohibited the practices in which he was then engaged; he knew also that upon such as dared to profane the eternal name and prophesy falsely, the weight of unspeakable judgments would rest; and notwithstanding, he deliberately assumed the character against which all these revelations levelled their curses, and delivered up himself to be the servant of the Devil, and the instrument of destruction to souls. The sin of sorcery we have considered in the character of Simon Magus.

The assumption of a prophet's habit was but a more subtle mode of seeking to propagate evil, and evidenced a still greater degree of hardness of heart, and desperate presumption. This is immediately manifest to our own judgment, and the Lord has added the incontrovertible testimony of his own word in respect of this awful character. We possess it in the words of the Apostle, he at once addresses him upon his manifest relationship to the father of lies, "Thou child of the Devil;" he instantly strikes upon the secret spring of his present diabolical proceedings, charging him with being "full of all subtlety and all mischief;" he testifies of the leading disposition which instigated him thus to fight against the Lord, being an "enemy to all righteousness;" and as the result of this internal depravity, having a tongue bold "to pervert the right ways of the Lord." Here is an accumulation of guilt the most terrible, and the most decisive as to the demonstration of that extent to which Elymas had willingly given up himself, without hesitation or reserve, to do the works of Satan. We may readily conclude what would be the shame and confusion which overwhelmed his mind and soul, at finding himself entangled in the net that he had laid for others, and exposed to the contempt and abhorrence of all who knew him: his prospects of gain all closed, his reputation blasted, his crimes declared, and in addition, his wretched body rendered a spectacle to man, and a figure of the infatuation which had blinded him to his true interests, and led him in darkness to the pit. Obligated also to acknowledge his own helplessness, his want of power to work any wonder in his own defence, and his dependance upon the compassion of such as might be induced to lead him away, the condition of this man is rendered the more terrible, because it appears too evident that he had no

compunction of soul ; there is not the expression even of fear ; and no sound that escapes from his lips, which might suggest a hope of his repentance for his sins.

Our examination of the character of Elymas should conduct us into the same act towards ourselves, turning our sincere desires upon the endeavour to know whose and what we are. It is admitted that we may take the comfort of hoping, that our actual crimes have not assumed a deadly form like that we behold in this sorcerer ; yet, when we dwell upon the charge of the Apostle against him, we are struck with the similarity which exists in the condition of this man, and that described in the scriptures as belonging to *human nature* in general. The human race is charged with the awful state of a direct agreement with Satan, even as *his children* ; for since the fall, the spirit which animates and actuates the world, is that of the Devil. Our allegiance to this fallen creature, is one of an assimilation of all desires, appetites, and affections ; for we are voluntarily, and deliberately, and universally lovers of any thing in preference to God, and bent upon the paths which are in direct opposition to his will. We are enemies to all righteousness, for the natural heart is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be ; and hence arises that practical and experimental exhibition of the spirit of Elymas, which so perpetually demonstrates our first original, although under various modifications in different persons ; for alas ! we are not only enemies to all righteousness, but are full of all subtlety and all mischief.

As it respects *ourselves*, this fatal working of indwelling sin is prevalent in the most affecting degree. The indwelling *mischief* is unspeakable, for self-destruction seems its aim ; and the indwelling *subtlety* is most alarming, for self-imposition

is its constant purpose. We prove this is the very way for which Elymas stands condemned ; for it is by seeking to *pervert* the right way of the Lord. How innumerable are the instances wherein we palpably practise a deceit upon ourselves, speaking false prophecies, foretelling of peace when there is nothing but destruction, and inventing to ourselves various foundations for comfort, contrary to the right and only way appointed by the Lord. How often do we pervert the right ways of the Lord, by wilfully misconceiving the nature of God and of salvation, drawing false conclusions from the revealed doctrines, and thus entering into a strange and infatuated confederacy with Satan against our own souls, and so deliberately persisting in this course, that even when the witnesses of truth arise within or around us, we resist and oppose their voice, and will not admit that we are wrong. The experience of every man will confirm this statement ; he knows that he is naturally opposed to spirituality, and in friendship with the world. God's word has assured him that such a condition is already condemned, but he is determined upon speaking peace to himself without obeying what this assurance demands. This determination meets with opponents from conscience, knowledge, ministers, scriptures, saints ; these he withstands, and absolutely *seeks* to turn away his own soul from the faith. In this attempt he knows that he uses subtlety, and he ought to feel that he is practising an irreparable mischief against himself, should he die in these paths ; notwithstanding, he still obstinately persists, and at this moment if reading the case of Elymas with attention, must perceive, that he reflects the same image, and is in the same condemnation.

But these evils are not confined to ourselves ; there is in nature a desire of proselyting others to our opinions, or of gaining countenance in our

own rebellion, by adding numbers to our party ; hence the mischief and subtlety that is in us breaks forth, and what has been practised internally, becomes a system proposed and recommended strenuously to the souls of fellow men. It is in this way that infidels, sceptics, worldlings, and all descriptions of sinners, practise a lie upon society, by seeking to darken Revelation, bring truth into question and doubt, misrepresent the divine requirement and the true witnesses, having in view to turn away men from the faith, and to discourage inquirers, or entangle them in the endless mazes which human reason will propose.

This is a frightful condition in every point of view, and is affectingly represented by the judgment inflicted on Elymas. Spiritual judgments are frequently inflicted, which answer to the visitation of blindness, under which the Sorcerer departed from the presence of the Apostle. Jesus the Sun of Righteousness shines forth in the gospel heaven to give the light of life to men ; to him men are invited to look ; and the promise is, that he will rise with healing in his wings. It is an awful fact, that we are all naturally in such a state of blindness, that we see not this glorious source of light, yet we may hope, that by the powerful influence of his beams, we may be delivered from this native misery, and still be enabled to see him who is the life. Not so if once we are *judicially* blind ; a sentence which is the consequence of having resisted the testimony with the enmity of a resolved opposer to the Lord. We have had many examples of this condition in the past series of subjects which we have considered, and we understand, no doubt, that this is one of the judgments of the Almighty, and that he has reserved it as an expression on this side of eternity, of that irreversable sentence which he will pronounce, ere long, on all such offenders ; and which

should cause all who hear, to tremble and fear before him. Terrible indeed is that helpless state which shuts up a soul in eternal spiritual night; and if we have any apprehension of things which are eternal, a solemn awe will dwell upon the thoughts, whilst we contemplate such a visitation.

These impressions may be very serviceable to our individual experience, by putting us upon increased solicitude to be delivered from all mental darkness, since in whatever degree it may remain in us it is the sure attendant upon further evils. Whatever may be the present sorrow, which may be induced by timely consideration of these subjects, it ought not for a moment to be put in the scale against our decision for truth; since it is not merely the passing transitory days we are spending in this vale of tears, but the future everlasting world that is concerned in these considerations. Let us therefore with minds alert to the work, and aware of its importance, watch against the subtlety of sin that is in us; fear the mischievous devices of Satan and our own treacherous hearts; and come to the light with unfeigned desire that all mists may be dispersed, and that our eyes may contemplate truth, as revealed in the great gospel fountain of all blessings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we are really awakened to the sense of our native darkness and helplessness, let us *acknowledge* its lamentable influence, and confess to all who may have received injury through us, our present conviction and sorrow. We should endeavour to undo the evils we have produced by an ingenuous and full acknowledgment of the delusion under which we have acted. Or if we are labouring under the painful sense of remaining darkness, if we are suffering under the consciousness of a helplessness that would settle us in hopeless despondency were we to look only to ourselves, let us remember how many helps the Lord has pro-

vided whereby we may be conducted along the way, and not proudly or unbelievably reject the aid which fellow creatures may afford ; for amongst them there are such as will rejoice to extend a succouring hand, and whose eyes have been opened by the Spirit of grace. We ought to hope that our conscious darkness will be but for a *season*—that ere long the remedies provided in the covenant may be applied in power ; and that although we at this moment mourn, as disconsolate and dreary in spirit, we may soon be privileged to put on the garment of praise, and to see our God. These hopes are equally applicable and justifiable, whether our blindness be that of original sin, or arising from declension, or indolence, or merited judgment ; for the *gospel* is the foundation on which the Christian's hope relies. This can never be removed ; and if we are truly desirous to derive its healing virtue into our own souls, we may steadfastly believe that the blessing will not be withheld. In the mean time we have an opportunity for shewing the wondrous change effected in our views and affections ; for if the work is of God, we shall justify him even in this our experience of darkness and grief : no longer *perverting* his *right ways*, but magnifying them as altogether righteous and good. However long he may be pleased to exercise us, or by whatever means, the language of our heart will then be “ Good is the word of the Lord ”—“ Just are all his ways ! ” In this spirit let us seek to improve the awful warning exhibited in Elymas, and be thankful that such records have been given, whereby to affect and quicken the sinner's soul.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we contemplate Thy great and dreadful judgments with minds humbled before Thee, and with hearts that would confess Thy power and adore Thy name. O be Thou pleased to enable us thus to enter into Thy presence, and to open our hearts before Thee at this time. Thou knowest, O Lord, what poor and miserable creatures we are, better than any of our expressions can tell ; and art acquainted with the extent of our wretched alienation from Thee, more than we, O Lord, can attain to know ; yet we would confess the affecting truth, we would own the lamentable fact, we would acknowledge that we are in deed and in truth the children of darkness, enemies to all righteousness, full of all mischief and subtlety, and stained with the sin of having perverted the right ways of the Lord ! What shall we say unto Thee, blessed God, for these abominations ! we can plead no excuse, for we have deliberately sinned ; we cannot cast any reproach upon Thee, for we have withstood the advocates sent by Thy mercy to our souls. We cast ourselves upon Thy free compassions, O God, here is all our hope, and we look for them in the blood of the covenant, this is all our trust. O let it be Thy pleasure mercifully to prove to us how Thou art working in our behalf individually ; and invincibly cause the alienation of our nature to depart, by giving us the spirit of adoption. Cause the reign of sin to fall by setting up within us the love of righteousness ; cause the deceitfulness of nature to perish by imparting the integrity of faith ; and O reconcile us in mind and heart to all Thy right ways, and make them the joy and rejoicing of our souls. We ask for the precious blood of our dear Redeemer to be sprinkled upon our souls, that we

may be delivered from all the guilt we have contracted ; and we implore Thee for the sense of this privilege that we may walk at liberty. There is nothing too much for us to ask or for Thee to give in Jesus our head and Lord ; and now that we lay claim to Thee in Him, and come to Thee as Thy own, O Lord God, acknowledge us in this relation, and fulfil our expectations from Thy boundless store. We pray Thee accept and sanctify and bless us wholly in this Thy purpose of redeeming love. Amen.

SERGIUS PAULUS.

Acts xiii. 7.

THE record which respects Sergius Paulus is very short, but it is very instructive ; and we examine it as an interesting testimony to the faithfulness of the Lord, and as important also from its close connexion with the history of Elymas already considered. He was a Roman, appointed by the government to the proconsulship of the Island of Cyprus, where it appears he received some impression upon his mind, which rendered him anxious on religious questions. This state of mind afforded to Elymas the hope of making a gain of him, and of proselyting him to his opinions ; and the opening was seized with avidity by the Sorcerer. His doctrines however did not satisfy the proconsul's judgment ; and being a man of intelligence and prudence, he sent for the Apostle Paul, that from him and Barnabas, he might receive some further information. We have considered the interview in treating on the character of Elymas, and the detection and disgrace of that impostor ; the effect of this judgment of God upon his mind is also recorded : when he saw what was done, he believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

The external advantages of Sergius had not been many, as to the interests of his soul ; his birth gave him no blessings of a religious description, but, on the contrary, placed him in the situation of being nurtured by the heathen, and educated in all the abominations of Gentile ignorance ; more especially with prejudice also against

both the Jew and the Christian. His station also was one in which it was rendered more improbable that he should receive or encourage religious impressions, not only on account of his many secular concerns, but because his worldly prospects became involved, if once he should be considered amongst the favourers of those whom the Romans considered it their interest to keep down; and, therefore, the strongest passions of the human breast were engaged to resist or prevent influences of a spiritual and sacred kind. The natural character however of Sergius was candid; and, though not a renewed man, he was blest with the possession of consideration, prudence, and intelligence, which not only influenced him in the discharge of his temporal responsibilities, but were very advantageous in disposing him to an ingenuous examination of those tenets which were proposed to him in things eternal. The free and gracious Spirit of the Lord visited Sergius, through the instrumentality of these dispositions. He was a chosen vessel of mercy, and when the fulness of time was come for the revelation of eternal life in his soul, the Lord laid hold upon these dispositions, by them stemming the torrent of evil poured in by Elymas, and opening the way for the reception of the true ambassadors of good. In the midst of all those external possessions, which we might have expected would satisfy his desires, Sergius was not happy; he found not in worldly goods or earthly honours, the portion which could fill his heart; and suffered that aching void which men of reflection are more or less conscious of, whilst unpossessed of peace with God. It is most likely, that in the first instance he sought out Elymas, who otherwise, probably, would not have been introduced into the intimate acquaintance with the proconsul, which it is evident he had, when these circumstances occurred. He possibly hoped

that as Elymas was a Jew, and a professed prophet, he might be able to relieve his solicitude, by pointing out to him the way of peace ; and would wait with anxious solicitude for what he might communicate. This was an expectation which, though naturally arising in a mind so little informed, was a more perilous part of his condition than any other, since it exposed him to the arts of a designing hypocrite, and made him humanly speaking, an easy prey for this fatal spirit. That it was not so in the issue, was owing to the protecting presence of the Holy Ghost, who refused to give his seal to the doctrines of the Sorcerer, and left the breast of Sergius devoid of comfort from this source. He also graciously excited the prudence of his mind to action, taught him not to listen implicitly to what was proposed, and put him upon examining the reasonableness and nature of those things on which it was the object of his instructor to urge him to repose. By the same divine guidance and protection he was prompted to inquire from a surer source, according to his idea intending only to act with precaution, and before he determined his opinions to hear what each could advance in support of their own views, but actuated by a higher operation than his own mind, and by the Holy Ghost put into the legitimate way of obtaining the knowledge of the only resting-place. In compliance with this suggestion, Sergius gave evidence of the powerful degree in which his heart was interested in the inquiry, for in so doing he not only overcame his own prejudices, but ventured upon an act which at once exposed him to suspicion, censure, and scorn, and which was violently opposed by his false teacher. But he possessed intrepidity and an independence of judgment united with his prudence ; and in a matter of so vast importance as the salvation of his soul, he resolved to risk every

consequence in this world, and to act without consulting the advice of such as would dissuade him from so rational a determination. How far the hearing of the word of God from the lips of the disciples, affected the heart of Sergius we are not informed ; probably he was more engaged in an action of the understanding than of the affections, whilst he listened to their discourse ; his object being to compare the two messages of the Sorcerer and of the disciple, and to discriminate between them as to what commended itself most for truth. The determination of his views was effected by a *miraculous* interposition, for it was the judgment which inflicted blindness on Elymas, that proved the mercy giving sight to his soul ; by this demonstration of the glorious superiority of the gospel, the reasoning and uncertainty of his mind were cast down, and the *doctrine of the Lord*, or the word proclaiming Messiah, was now heartily believed with full assent to the excellency and blessedness of peace in Jesus. Thus his anxieties were concluded in the satisfaction of his mind ; the aching void was filled in the possession of Jesus the Lord, as altogether such an one as his necessities required ; and henceforth he was invested with dignities which can never fade, and with a portion that must always fill the cup.

How refreshing and delightful is it to the child of God, to contemplate the triumphs of the cross ; and how interesting when presented, as in the case before us, so closely connected with examples of the wrath of the Almighty falling upon the sinner. A view of vengeance fills us with awe, and is calculated to impress us with deep apprehensions of the justice of Jehovah ; but when we contemplate the monuments of his mercy in sinners rescued from destruction, we see the manifestation of justice in the most touching form ; for this

mercy being extended through a crucified Redeemer, we think of the justice as glorified by a *surety's* sufferings. The example of God's covenant love displayed to Sergius, does not exceed repeated instances of the same description in our own day. The Holy Ghost has now, as in him, equally to meet and to subdue prejudices, to surmount the evils of a bad education, and to cast down the power of the present world. So likewise the attempts of the infidel are still hot and avowed ; men of this description blush not to confess that they are in arms against truth ; and others, being equally opposed to the true doctrine, are unwearied in attempting to impose false principles, and a mongrel kind of religion by which they hope to prevail in maintaining the kingdom of darkness, or the dominion of earthly views. But what are all these attempts when put in array against the Lord of Hosts. What are the impotent expectations of the creature, however towering and high in pretension, when the blast of the Almighty is near ; before him they must fall, and Jehovah will triumph in saving his people from their force. Let us adore the greatness of Jehovah, and celebrate the fulness of the cross.

In the accomplishment of these great designs, the Lord is frequently pleased to carry his people through an experience something like that of Sergius. It is not in the world to *satisfy any* man ; finite objects were never intended to fill an immortal soul ; and even fallen as we are, there is a kind of instinctive sense of this ever prevailing in the heart. But in those who are under the saving purpose of grace, this sense of the emptiness of present scenes is generally sent home upon the heart with a very peculiar power, following them in all societies and situations, and in possessions most pure and legitimate, still giving that kind of feeling which seems ever to be saying,

“ This is not thy rest.” This kind of experience will frequently be endured a considerable time before adequate relief is found ; sometimes from the want of able helpers, there being none within reach, from whom the word of God may be received ; and sometimes from a want of candour and prudence in the mind, when there may be either a too hasty reception of false pretension, or a too tardy purpose of investigating what others may propose. In both these cases, the poor soul is kept in a prolonged condition of suffering. Here therefore we should feel grateful to that divine covenant, which, notwithstanding, will eventually give relief, and fill the heart by revealing Jesus. But we should be doubly grateful, if it has pleased him to bestow upon us a prudence and candour comparable to the possession of Sergius, and moving us like him to consult with resolution and diligence, whatever may promise us relief to our anxiety and justifiable repose. If we are awakened to a sense not only of the *want* that is in the heart, but to the conviction that religion alone can fill it, we have great need to exercise this disposition of prudence. Our quickened affections may otherwise prove a handle for the subtle and designing, and lead us into some spiritual trouble. False teachers abound in the world, and even in the professing church. They pretend to know truth, and would pass for prophets with men. Our awakened sensibilities being encompassed by our remaining ignorance, will give them advantage over us, unless we are prudent. Therefore, whilst we are watching against a sceptical mind, or a disputatious spirit, we should guard against the opposite extreme, and *try* the spirits, not committing the concerns of our immortal souls to the unexamined pretensions of any man. We should be willing to hear, but hear with discrimination. The *word of God* is our rule, and true witnesses

will direct us to the examination of their message by this standard. And as the spiritual servants of Jesus are not relished in this world, and are opposed by the false teachers, we should prudently *hear for ourselves* ; not take the common report by which they are cast out as evil, but in the first place exercise candour and uprightly inquire. We shall experience in these dependent efforts, the blessed illumination of the Holy Ghost. This divine teacher proves his witness through the gospel message, and will render it convincing and satisfactory to the true inquirer. There is in the *doctrine of Christ* every thing which answers to the necessities of immortal souls. The experience of Sergius is not a solitary or rare instance, In every soul where the kingdom of eternal life is established, it is known that the gospel contains the all-sufficient portion. It is a doctrine proclaiming pardon, revealing peace, opening an access to God, and applying all which sweetens present experience, and enriches the redeemed eternally ; so that when this doctrine is proclaimed, accompanied by the Almighty operation of the Holy Ghost, the sinner is *astonished*, but it is an astonishment of love, admiration, delight ; ending in that faith which appropriates all that is revealed, to the glory of God, and the rest of the soul.

Let us meditate upon this revelation. The judgment displayed upon the opposer of the truth, manifests how gloriously Jesus is exalted as Lord, Head, and Judge, having the government in his own hands, and distributing his awful tokens of power as gathering round his purposes of grace to defend and uphold them before men. Whilst these reflections lead us to perceive more powerfully the necessity of receiving the truth if we would live, they also suggest to us the ground which the Christian has for confidence and fearless trust in such a friend. He is eternal, and mighty,

and ever present with his aid, "he that toucheth" a redeemed one "toucheth the apple of his eye;" and with a rapid grace that interposes for the saints with prompt deliverance, and according to their need, he will secure them from the foe, and strike their adversaries down. History pours its testimony forth upon us in confirmation of this truth; and eternity shall prove that Jesus Christ has never failed the ransomed of his blood.

We esteem it a great blessing to have a prudent mind in the management of our worldly concerns, how much more should the possession be approved in its bearings upon everlasting interests! Let this be admitted; and with this disposition let us diligently embrace the several great objects which demand our attention. This will put us upon foreseeing the evil which must inevitably overtake us if we remain unsheltered, and upon providing for our safety by *hiding ourselves* in that place of refuge which the gospel proposes. To postpone or neglect the application of the Lord's wonderful compassion is the act of one devoid of the true use of reason; and whilst we are living in such insensibility to our own welfare, we are condemned by the example of Sergius, and are destitute of prudence where it ought most visibly to abound. How is it then with us? Have we an aching empty heart? Let us turn to those inquiries which were pursued by Sergius, and seek to receive fulness and rest from the source whence they flow. Are we exposed to circumstances and associations wherein the ways of the Lord are withstood and misrepresented? Let us guard against the baneful influence and beware of prejudice. Have we the opportunity of making an investigation for ourselves? Let us hear and examine, not allowing the persuasions of others to deter us from inquiry. Is it a day of error and heresy in which we live? Let us *try* the spirits,

for this is a scripture command. And if we have attained to the persuasion of what *is* truth, let us hold fast our profession, and steadfastly embrace with the whole heart that glorious salvation which is established in the eternal Son, and in which we are assured of inheriting, even in this world, ever-satisfying delights ; for he that drinketh of the water that Jesus Christ shall give, will never thirst, and he that eateth of his flesh, shall find it meat indeed.

PRAYER.

WE pray Thee, blessed and eternal God, in thine own infinite mercy to look upon us, who are earnestly seeking a saving interest in Thee, and a comforting assurance of Thy love ; and do Thou in compassion strengthen the energies of the faith with which we would follow after the fulness of the eternal kingdom. Our eyes and hearts are elevated unto Thee, and our affections wait beneath Thy feet, hoping that heavenly blessings will descend upon them, and hallow them all for Thee. O answer the anxious desires of our souls that now hang upon Thee. Satisfy the appetites that would be replenished by Thee ; and so enter our hearts that we may experience the rest and peace which is realized in Thy appropriated love. O blessed Lord, do Thou deliver us from all mixtures of earthly, carnal, low, perceptions, which would mingle with our offerings to Thee : do Thou purify us by the fire of divine love kindled by the indwelling Spirit ; and under the sacred influences of His grace help us to be more and more victorious over every thing that opposes itself to Thy rule. Grant, Almighty God, that we may faithfully withstand the various evils which surround our path ; grant that we may rise above the stratagems

and devices of those powers that are leagued against our peace ; and O make us evermore to understand the sure promise, and to lay hold upon it as our portion, by which we may be confident of final triumph. We pray Thee to open our hearts and minds to the gospel of salvation, in such power as may gladden us with Thy own unspeakable joy ; and to give us the knowledge of the doctrine of Christ with a sense of its liberating grace. May we receive the Lord Jesus as the only and great salvation, and find in the fulness of His name all that we want or desire. O give us pardon—put on us the justifying robe of Jesus' merit—so that in his righteousness and blood, we may have comfort and eternal life. And fill us with the Holy Ghost, that blessed, divine, invincible Witness ; and make us His abode, that our whole life may be consistent with our hopes. Lord God Eternal, answer the prayer of Thy children, bless us with Thy ever-present grace, and may we rest in Thee now and evermore. Amen.

SILAS, OR SILVANUS.

Acts xv. 22, 25—27.

WE have two characters introduced to our notice in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, wherein the excellent operations of the Holy Ghost are richly displayed : these are Silas and Barsabas. The latter is mentioned in connexion with Matthias, Acts i. 23 ; but we have no other particulars respecting his course than that he was faithful, and influenced by the Holy Spirit in a way similar to that of his companion Silas ; they are alike described as “chief men amongst the brethren,” and as having “hazarded their lives for the name of Jesus Christ.” Of Silas we have a more enlarged account, as he was associated with Paul in his arduous labours, and we confine ourselves therefore, on the present occasion, to his character. We have no particulars of his parentage, but we gather from the history that he was a Hebrew—that, by some means, he had freedom as a Roman citizen—and that the grace of the Lord Jesus had visited his soul, giving him spiritual freedom as a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem. In this privilege he stood high in the estimation of the church, and was considered a proper witness to intrust with the letters to the Gentile church at Antioch. Here he, along with Barsabas, exercised their ministry, being themselves prophets or teachers, and edified the saints, continuing there some time ; but at length Barsabas returned to Jerusalem, and Silas prepared to remain with the brethren at Antioch, where he laboured with the rest of the servants of the ministry, but, it appears, in particular association with Paul, who, on his

separation from Barnabas, chose Silas as his constant companion in missionary efforts. We have already seen, in considering the life of Paul, how closely this disciple was connected with him in bodily afflictions, persecutions, and works of faith; and how eminently he partook of the spirit of his companion, so he also participated in Divine manifestations and peculiar experiences of joy and peace in the Lord. He is supposed to be the same as Silvanus, who is frequently mentioned by the apostle; 2 Cor. i. 19. 1 Thess. i. 1. 2 Thess i. 1; and by Peter, 1 Pet. v. 12.

Much as we may justly consider the character of Paul and Silas alike, there is a sufficient variety to form with us a distinct subject of inquiry and improvement. He was evidently a man of very extensive possessions in the heavenly life; and, however long or short might be the period of his Christian profession, previously to the mention of his name in the scriptures, it is affirmed that he had been exposed to imminent peril in his course, having hazarded his life for the furtherance of the blessed cause of Jesus. Hence it is evident that his heart was powerfully and deeply affected with divine truth; he believed and embraced the revelation of God's dear Son, with an ardent and devoted love, both of the truths revealed and of the person of him in whom they were established; Jesus becoming the beloved of his soul, for whose sake he was willing to sacrifice every other interest. He was taught by the Holy Spirit the *proper* estimate he ought to put upon present objects and upon his own life. These were held as talents committed to him, and of which it was his duty to be careful, as a good steward, that the Lord's goods might be laid out to the glory of the divine Owner. But with this diligence in the preservation of his possession, he was impressed with the full convic-

tion that the Lord had a right to demand it at his will ; and that if the interest of the faith called for an exposure of his person, it was his part to *hazard* his life. It is manifest that Silas possessed this spiritual understanding, for we find him readily admitting the duty of self-preservation, and using all prudential means for this end ; at the same time that he did not hesitate in laying his life at the Saviour's feet, to be taken when and as he pleased. His soul was eminently delivered from the fear of man. We follow him through paths the most perilous, we see him beaten with stripes, cast into prison, and enduring innumerable hardships, yet preserved in an undaunted spirit, and immediately upon being released from one danger, cheerfully exposing himself to another ; and animated by the one simple object of glorifying his Lord and Master, whether it might be by life or by death. Thus he stood high in the possession of those peculiar affections which are wrought by the Holy Ghost, and which lead the sincerely devoted to an unconditional and persevering service of the cross. But he was also distinguished by the possession of the Spirit's divine operation fitting him to be an able witness to others of the truth which animated himself. He had not only a willing mind but an eloquent tongue, whose persuasion and power resided in the Holy Ghost ; he was enabled to teach, and exhort, and confirm the disciples, by words of heavenly wisdom ; and was accepted and blest in the labour of love to which he had been ordained ; so that his influence and powers were acknowledged as a treasure in the spiritual sanctuary, and he was exalted in the estimation and affections of all who loved the truth. The same spirit which had animated him in his first entrance upon the profession, remained in him, kindling a sacred fire in his breast, and rendering those scenes the most acceptable to him where

the prospect of work and usefulness most abounded. The life of a missionary was to him the life of enjoyment, for he was constrained by the love of Christ to seek the lost souls of men ; and in consequence he preferred Antioch, when it appeared that a door of acceptance was opened to him there ; and could as readily quit this station, for the arduous travels of his brother Paul, when the providence of the Lord so directed his course. There was nothing in this prospect but certain sufferings, many tribulations, much solicitude, and every thing from which *nature* would be disposed to shrink : but Silas had a soul glowing with a holy ambition to tread in the steps of his Lord ; and unappalled by any outward difficulties, he pressed to the mark, and steadfastly pursued the one glorious course to which the Saviour's voice had called him. It is delightful to observe how this ardour was united with dependence : a spirit of prayer pervaded his soul, and with it a spirit of praise also ; all his resources were from his God, all his victories issued in glory to him ; he drew from the inexhaustible supplies which are laid up in Jesus the living head, and he magnified the faithfulness of that divine purpose, by which he was at all times comforted, blest, and upheld. It is in this disposition that we see him encountering every storm, and that we hear him unite with his brother sufferer in the prison to extol the eternal name. He was not behind the apostle, either in fervour, zeal, or charity ; his devotion had no tardy indisposition towards the undertakings which they set out together to prosecute, but, on the contrary, glowed with a steady, undeviating flame, which ever pointed upwards, and aimed at the exaltation of the cross. Nor does he ever betray the least perturbation of spirit or distraction of thought ; having committed his all to the Lord, he confided in him for all, and practically demonstrated

how his faith had apprehended an all-sufficient Redeemer.

These are features of character sufficiently decisive to shew that Silas was justly esteemed as amongst the most eminent of cross-bearers, having a blessed spring of all holy principle opened in him by the Holy Ghost as his indwelling and abiding life, and possessing also those relative gifts which constituted him an able advocate of the gospel amongst men. Peter's mention of him as "a faithful brother, as *I suppose*," not meaning any reflection upon his character or profession as a disciple, but being merely an expression of that humility with which we should judge one another.

There are some very useful reflections suggested to the Christian by the character given of Silas and Barnabas, which may engage us in serious thoughts respecting our own pretensions or dispositions. We may rest upon the signification of the phrase *chief men*: it is full of import, and leads us at once to perceive the nature of *Christian* elevation. We know that *pride* is abhorrent to a Christian mind, for it is abominable to the Holy Ghost. He who undertakes the new creation, bringing the soul into that state of existence which is suitable to a creature, will "hide pride from man," accomplishing such an experience in the heart as shall preserve abasement, and make the vessels of mercy to know and feel that they are nothing in themselves. Love of *pre-eminence* is also contrary to the eternal Spirit's operation, and will not be suffered in the breasts of those who are the habitation of God. In such dwellings, humility, self-renunciation, and the grace of preferring one another will be wrought; so that, although nature is always disposed to seek its own, the new principle will maintain the disposition of seeking rather the things of others. It is evident that this is

Christian doctrine. Were it not so, the gospel would be found giving countenance to the most baneful passions and deeds; for, alas! out of a spirit of pride and self-preference, there ariseth envy of others, detraction, presumption, and sometimes discouragement and murmuring; all evils, which disgrace too many *professors* of the faith, but which are not admitted into the Christian government. Yet to be *chief men* is a subject of lawful Christian emulation, of which we have examples in scripture; and in fact the whole spirit of the gospel addresses us with exhortations, which urge upon us to run, wrestle, aspire, pant after, and love the highest attainments to which a believer can reach: so that on no account are we allowed to fold up our talent—to sit still in indolence—to see others attaining, without a wish to be like them—or to shrink from the greatest responsibilities which the providence of God may lay upon us. Our part therefore must be, first to acquaint ourselves with what is *chief* in the estimation of the Lord, and *how* that distinction is attained by his disciples. Chief things, in God's sight, are humility, dependence, love; if we examine his word we shall discover that these are the excellent possessions which he counts precious. He has expressly declared them to be so; and he has manifested in those persons who were eminent for these dispositions a peculiar favour, proving that he delights in such a spirit. The way to the attainmen' is by self-denial, readiness to suffer, zeal and devotion to his interests, as our dearest object. So that in order to be *chief men*, we must enter the path-way of eminent affliction, or labour, or in some form demonstrate that Jesus Christ is supreme within us, and that we are ready, in his strength to stand foremost in peril for his name. These are distinctions very different from what the world exalts; they are very different from what

the proud lover of pre-eminence will covet ; and as they consist of dispositions which, where self is sacrificed, are the effect of supernatural operations from God in the heart, they become subjects on which ambition may be expressed in a sanctified form, and where the possessor will grow more in humility, as he makes progress to the blessed eminence. Let us therefore understand that to be amongst chief men with the brethren, or before the Lord, describes a state wholly opposite to all self-seeking. It consists of distinctions bestowed by the Holy Ghost, used in the service of Christ, leading to the hazarding of life itself for the name of Jesus, and exhibiting a disposition to wash the disciples' feet, to be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, to accept any department allotted by the Infinite Head, and to fill it in simplicity and faith. And O how blessed is that disciple of whom it can in truth be said, 'behold him chief in love, chief in self-denial, chief in lowliness, chief in labour, chief in prayer, dependence, praise !' These are the adornings which the Holy Ghost puts into the renewed soul, beautifying it in holiness, and making it amongst chief monuments to the praise of redeeming love.

Wherever this real Christian elevation of character is produced, we shall discern the operation in various ways, particularly in the regulation of *zeal* ; for such persons will always prefer and choose their abode according to the proportion of *usefulness*, rather than of personal comfort. It is very desirable for all believers to consider this, because as zeal is an invariable attendant upon conversion, it becomes a question of universal application how far we are actuated by this consideration. Our simplicity herein will be attended with consequent prosperity ; but if we connive at the reasonings of the flesh, and are fettered by consulting for our own case, reputation, and

present advantage, we are committing an offence which will be severely chastened, both in the decrease of our influence and of our peace, and in after deep regrets, when the Lord shall undertake to abase us for our sin. How much more blessed is the spirit of Silas!—how invariably is it followed with divine visitations, which amply recompense for every inconvenience or suffering; for a soul that thus simply lives upon, and with the Lord, is privileged to realize the presence of the Lord *every* where. He knows that the mercy-seat is always to be found; he can sing in the prison of his mortal tabernacle, or in the dungeon into which his foes may cast him; not that he has in himself any power which will secure his privilege, but he is acknowledged by his faithful heavenly Friend, and has his strength given according to his day.

Let us bring this subject into application to our own souls, by an examination of ourselves according to this rule, inquiring whether we are numbered with *brethren* in the Lord? know their peculiar bonds, and taste their holy fellowship? Let us see whether we dwell amongst them in humility and harmony, seeking the furtherance of the spiritual health of the body. Our business should also be to look to the station we occupy in that body, whether it be amongst the *chief*, having a rule over *self*, and an inheritance in the Holy Ghost, which justly distinguishes us as eminent in the Lord. Let us ask if we have such love as will *hazard* any thing for Christ? fortune, friends, character, health, life? so that none of those things stand in the way of our open confession of his name, or of our *laborious* confession of his cause. And let us examine whether we have found in affliction the sweetness of prayer, and in oppression from the enemy the power of praise. Such is the real Christian lot, such is the distinction sometimes

realized in most *abundant* operations in the Christian's heart. And when the soul is thus elevated, it asks no other honour, save that it may advance in blest degrees of this possession, passing from grace to grace, and at length attaining the fruition of the Lord in glory. In these blessed objects let our affections centre; they will enrich us beyond what thousands of worlds could bestow, and will invest us from one of Jesus' smiles with a portion which exceeds the richest diadems of earth. O may this glory descend and rest upon our head; and Jesus' anointing consecrate us evermore as kings and priests in the kingdom of his grace!

PRAYER.

MOST blessed Saviour, bestow the spiritual treasures of Thy kingdom upon us, we humbly implore Thee, and make our hearts to abound in the joyful sense of Thy redeeming love. O grant us the experience of that omnipotent grace of the covenant by which the heart is lifted up to the realms of glory, and faith is enabled to penetrate into the gladdening scenes which are before Thy throne above. Give us the power of shaking off all our earthly, fleshly, selfish corruption, that we may not be fettered to the present world, nor bound in any chain that would hold us back from Thee. We desire to press onwards in the heavenly race, and to attain to the eminence of the faith which is exhibited in Thy scripture saints. O give us the single eye, the devoted heart, which will labour and look to Thee as they have done who are gone before; and grant, blessed Saviour, that we may also glorify Thee by manifesting in our own course the victories of Thy cross. O may we prove that in the blood of that cross, and in the Spirit propitiated thereby, we have received liberty,

and that our professed subjection to Thy name is one of love and in power. We know that Thou art able now as Thou wast of old, to perfect Thy strength in our weakness; and that vile and weak as we are, we can never be discouraged whilst we may appeal to Thee. O make us experimentally and practically to understand our privilege, and to walk before Thee as saints and servants, having our all consecrated unto Thee, and our lives endowed with the Spirit's power, to give us energy and zeal in following Thee. O make us amongst the chief of brethren in all holy experience, in humility, dependence and love. Make us chief amongst labourers in self-discipline, self-renunciation, and fervent works. And whatever Thou mayest send of trial in our path, grant us the power of resting upon Thy promises in simple trust. O God of our salvation, we bless Thee, we praise Thee for all Thou hast been in ages past to Thy little flock—for all Thou hast been in days past to us Thy people—and for all Thou now art as an unchanging and all-sufficient Friend. Receive our tribute, accept our praise, and fill us with Thyself now and evermore, that we may live to Thee. These blessings we humbly implore in the name of our dear and gracious Lord. Amen.

TIMOTHY.

Acts xvi. 1—3.

WE have scarcely a more interesting character upon record than that of Timothy. The word of God presents us with several very important and instructive particulars in his history, and we enter upon this investigation with a rich field before us, containing an exhibition of the precious fruits of the Spirit, which our faith should gather and our love appreciate. The early advantages possessed by Timothy were very great. What is recorded of his parentage in Acts xvi. 1, has some addition in 2 Tim. i. 5, so that we are informed of his education as carried on under the superintendence of his grandmother and mother, both of them devoted believers in Jesus. Of his father nothing is recorded but that he was by birth a Greek ; whether he were living at the time when Timothy is mentioned in the Scripture is not said, neither any thing respecting his religious character ; probably he was dead : for the care of Timothy seems to have devolved upon his mother exclusively. He was trained up from childhood with a strict and diligent attention to the holy Scriptures, in the knowledge of which he made great proficiency, 2 Tim. iii. 15. But it appears that the conversion of his soul was through the instrumentality of Paul, probably at the time of his first mission to Lystra, Acts xiv. 6. for he calls him with a peculiar endearment, “his own son in the faith.” 1 Tim. i. 2. The report of Timothy as a believer was such as gave great consolation to the Apostle, so that when he revisited Lystra he resolved to take him into association with him in

the work of the ministry ; and since his knowledge of the Scriptures promised to render him an able instructor of the Jews, he obliged him to submit to the law of circumcision, that he might have no hinderance placed in his way from Jewish prejudices, Acts xvi. 1—3. It appears from 2 Tim. i. 6, that Timothy was solemnly set apart for the ministry by prayer and laying on of the hands of the Apostle, and that the Holy Ghost sealed this ordination, by bestowing upon him ministerial gifts ; himself dwelling in his heart, giving the "*good thing*" mentioned in verse 14, that is, the effectual grace of his sanctifying presence and sufficient gifts. Either at this time, or at some previous period, certain prophetic intimations of Timothy's future faithfulness were given for the encouragement of himself and his friends, of which the Apostle affectionately reminds him, urging that he should live accordingly, 1 Tim. i. 18. These beginnings were blessed promises of what his after-course justified ; for we find him maintaining a fellowship with his suffering Redeemer, in company with Paul in many of his labours, and in his own more settled ministry fulfilling his high calling to the glory of God ;—whilst with Paul he evidently manifested a spirit full of holy consistency, ministering to the necessities of his beloved friend with great sympathy, and discharging many important trusts reposed in him by the apostle in the care of the churches. Thus he is included in Paul's greetings to the Christians, 2 Cor. i. 1. Rom. xvi. 21, where he calls him his work-fellow, and his brother. He sent him also into Macedonia, Acts xix. 22, and to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. iv. 17, approving him as his beloved son and faithful in the Lord. Writing to the Philippians he highly commends him as having a kindred spirit with himself, and as disinterestedly caring for their welfare with true ministerial love, Phil. ii. 19—23.

To the Thessalonians he speaks of him as a brother, or minister of God, a fellow labourer in the gospel, and as an experienced witness, able to establish and comfort the afflicted church, 1 Thess. iii. 2. And we gather from the style in which Paul addresses him, that he possessed and evinced a remarkably tender sense of the Apostle's afflictions, weeping with him, and receiving his sorrows into a heart that truly understood their extent; a demonstration of feeling which he gratefully acknowledged, 2 Tim. i. 4: iii. 10, 11. The chief place of Timothy's ministry and residence was Ephesus; where he was established with full ministerial authority, and laboured, as is evident from Paul's epistles to him, amidst many difficulties, but under much blessing. He was very young when he entered upon his public work, 1 Tim. iv. 12; he seems also to have had very delicate health, 1 Tim. v. 23; but these were no impediments to his laborious career. We have no account of his death: tradition reports that he suffered martyrdom, when attempting to repress some endeavours to establish idolatry; but this is uncertain. The Scriptures however speak of one occasion in which it is evident he had been a prisoner, but for what reason is not stated. Heb. xiii. 23.

Already, in this short sketch of Timothy's history, we are in possession of certain traits of his character which compel our admiration; and what remains to be gathered out of the sacred testimony serves but to confirm our impressions of affection towards him. It is at the same time very important to observe how these excellences were produced in him by the Spirit, and that he was a *regenerate* man, receiving his distinctions as the effect of grace, and requiring like all other vessels of mercy to be exhorted, and to exercise gracious acts as a soul under *discipline*, in order to maintain

the consistency of his faith. His habits were probably moral, and his spirit reverential, from the earliest opening of his mind; his education and relative condition would tend to secure this; but *conversion* is a work much more important and extensive, and the views of Timothy would no doubt be marvellously changed and enlarged, when, in addition to the instruction of his mother, he received the teaching of the Holy Ghost. This divine instruction being an opening of the *letter* of the Scriptures, and a sealing of what he had heard from the lips of the creature, to which St. Paul directs his recollection, knowing *of whom* thou hast learned them; not only by the early counsel of teachers, but by him who wrought effectually to produce in him *faith unfeigned*. 2 Tim. iii. 14: i. 5.

In the discharge of ministerial duties, he appears before us in great excellence, as we have seen. Being fully *endowed* to this end, he faithfully used his gift, living in habits of self-denial and mortification, as is evident from the Apostle's affectionate exhortation to care more for his body, considering his delicate habit of constitution. And being possessed of dispositions which in the course of his blessed engagements were constantly displayed, in affections essential to a spiritual parent of souls; sympathetic, laborious, impartial—sound in his doctrine, enlarged in his views, rich in the Scriptures, and ready to endure, he fully justified the appellations which were given him by his father in the gospel, and was truly *a man of God*, 1 Tim. vi. 11.

In the midst of his relative labours, he had also to maintain the inward fight of faith, and was exposed to the assaults of the enemy, and the sollicitations of the flesh. Of these perils Paul was tenderly aware, and with parental vigilance watched over him; by this very vigilance proving to us

that Timothy was one who required much personal exertion in the life of faith, in order to fulfil his calling. His *youth* exposed him, both from the temptations peculiarly belonging to that period of life, and from the propensity of men to undervalue the counsels of the young ; a circumstance which might prove a temptation to discouragement or to carelessness ; he is therefore strongly exhorted on these grounds, 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2: ii. 15, 22. 1 Tim. iv. 12—16 ; and it is evident was carefully followed by the tender guardianship of the Apostle, who sought by exhorting others also, to remove this peril out of his way. 1 Cor. xvi. 10, 11.

By considering these particulars with attention, we ascertain the nature of that life of faith, which was so eminently displayed by Timothy ; we see him a remarkably distinguished character, attaining to singular blessedness in the path of ministerial usefulness, and possessing an equal proportion of all internal excellence ; but we see the whole to be the fruit of the Divine Spirit, raising him by supernatural power into an existence above fallen nature ; and we look also into a bosom where there resided pains and griefs, forcing the testimony of sighs and tears, and where a conflict also was known in common with other saints ; making his high Christian experience to be the result of sanctified victories over the flesh, and the world, and Satan !

When bringing a character of this description into connection with our own spiritual interests, so as to seek personal edification, we must remember, that although every Christian is not called to occupy the high station which we may be contemplating, every Christian is called to possess the gracious principles discoverable in the eminent saint ; so that if we are upright, we cannot fail of obtaining benefit from every example of this

description. We may on this occasion be stirred up to see and appreciate the benefit of having *early* or youthful privileges in the gospel. The blessing of having devoted parents is beyond our calculation ; especially when they are disposed to give particular attention to our growth in *scriptural* knowledge. The word of God is the testimony by which our faith is to be regulated ; we are to believe according to the rule and standard of divine revelation, whether it be in respect of the object of our worship, or its practical results ; so that to be made acquainted with this rule is of indescribable value to the soul. It may be that we learn as a child, nothing more than the letter of the word ; or that the lesson of instruction which our teachers give, whilst we are reading the Scriptures, scarcely makes any impression on the memory or understanding ; nevertheless if the *word* is committed to memory, and the Scriptures are familiarly known in their historical, prophetic, and epistolary statement, provision is made against the day of God's power ; which, when it comes, will breathe over the hitherto dead letter, quicken it into action, and render it an able instrument in diffusing the light and joy which are brought near by the eternal Spirit. Truths are then seen in God's light, impressions that seemed scarcely made now become visible, and the saving knowledge of one Scripture proves as an inlet to the rich mine contained in the whole, and introduces the soul into the treasures of the revelation of the covenant. They who have learnt or read the Scriptures from childhood, and have afterwards been visited by converting grace, will experimentally know that this is true ; and their testimony should be received as an encouragement to the pious grandmother and mother, or to any who have the charge of training up a child, to help them, as Timothy was helped, to know the Scrip-

tures from the earliest dawn of their understanding. This is a possession which we shall individually find exceedingly advantageous in our course ; we ought therefore to lay it up in the youthful mind with an accompanying sense of the blessing we are imparting, knowing that hereby we are at least supplying the *means*, by which error is detected and resisted, truth is seen and magnified, and the soul is rendered individually and relatively “wise to salvation,” and thoroughly furnished unto every good word and work. Let us however be careful not to rest in the letter, or be satisfied in giving merely the knowledge of what is written ; we have a further act of charity and faith to discharge towards others ; and young people should remember, that all their advantages of pious parents, knowledge, &c. will not avail to salvation without the quickening grace of the Holy Ghost. He it is who must unlock the truth, and he only can apply it ; we must therefore ask for the Spirit, that we may be something more than merely moral and reverential professors, and that *conversion* may be wrought in us by such a power from the word, as shall make us to know from whom we have learned, even from the Lord God himself.

Should we be privileged by the unspeakable blessing of having, like Timothy, “that good thing,” even a change of heart and a lot with the heirs of glory, let us accept the precepts which were directed to him, as altogether applicable to our circumstances. We have, like him, to demonstrate that we are *of God*—to prove it by consistency, which shall shew our *faith unfeigned*—to witness a good confession, according to the measure of our calling—and this is done by the same fruits which we behold in this young and maturing disciple. The spiritual gift that is in us, is, according to the doctrine of the gospel, an imperishable possession,

—it is imparted that it may abide in us for ever ; yet the same doctrine of the gospel requires that the regenerate *use* the mercy they have received ; and they are put upon demonstrating their faithfulness, by *stirring up* the gift that is in them. We are by nature corrupt ; this corruption would press upon grace, and keep down its actings ; indolence, cowardice, love of fleshly pursuits and gratifications, and innumerable other evils, work in us : in consequence it becomes our part to use our renewed will, putting it upon service, so as to call up the better principle which God has bestowed, to oppose, crucify, and destroy these evils. Thus in the exercise of prayer, reading, teaching, suffering, &c. there is a natural disinclination in the flesh, which, when we feel, we must stir up our souls immediatly to resist, by constraining ourselves to do the thing to which we are reluctant. We shall find by experience that this is absolutely necessary, in order to run a race that is consistent, or to be abidingly useful to others. In all stages of our pilgrimage we need it. In *youth*, in order to resist the fleshly lusts which war against the soul, and to live in the habits of mortification, discipline, and devotion ; so also to overcome those fears and anxieties, which frequently trouble the young disciple, lest others should despise them, or lest they should not hold on their way. In such a stage it must be remembered, that consistency usually commands respect ; that the very circumstance of being so young and yet so holy, is frequently an irresistible sermon, which even the haughty foe is made to confess ; and that the loveliness of a *real* discipleship in a young person, who is surrounded by the blandishments, pleasures, and seductions of the present world, is one of the most convincing memorials of Jesus' grace and power. These therefore should stir themselves up to such enlivening recollections. In the middle

age of life, there is an equal need of the Christian diligence, for this is a period when worldly cares, family anxieties, and various interests of the present scene, expose the soul to formality, or to a very grievous depression of that life of faith, which perhaps in former days was more vigorous and promising. How should such persons stir up the gift that is in them, to the subduing of those restless anxieties which grieve the Spirit—to the destruction of those inordinate earthly thoughts, which indispose for prayer—and when the gracious principle is thus loaded by the encumbering concerns of the world, to bid it arise in energy, and express itself as faith demands. In old age, surely there is an acknowledged necessity for this act, which we shall hear from every experienced soul. Who can feel or witness the infirmities attendant upon the decline of life, without having a full conviction of the excellency of the precept, as addressed to this time of life, “Stir up the spiritual gift that is in thee?” If indeed this good thing has been received, such persons should call upon it to demonstrate its abiding enlivening quality, and labour to prove to all around that there is in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost with the soul, a possession of vigorous principles which will outlive even the pressure of the most declining days. Some tribute of love we still may give, in the spirit of laborious faith; some kind admonition, or some offering of sympathy, which shall prove that grace is a never-failing portion abiding with the redeemed to their latest hours.

PRAYER.

O MOST gracious and merciful God, in Thy infinite grace behold us who are now before Thee, enabling us to lift up our souls to Thy mercy-seat,

and to call upon Thee in faith unfeigned, and with affections wholly devoted to Thy name. Whatever may be the calling by which we are known in this world, make us to fulfil it as heirs of a better and eternal home; and do Thou bless us with the Holy Ghost, that he may be our indwelling life. We humbly bless Thee for all those advantages which we have possessed in the present life; and more especially if we have received the benefit of early counsel, or have been the subjects of believing prayer, or have heard and learned Thy sacred word: these are mercies for which we are bound to offer Thee unceasing praise. Or if to us the blessing has not been given, yet, Lord, we have cause to praise Thee for having supplied that deficiency by the teachings of the Holy Ghost, and by raising up within our own hearts desires after Thy word. We know that there is not any advantage which can prove salvation to us, but only the blessing of knowing Jesus in the Spirit's power; and if Thou hast brought us to this possession by whatever means, O accept our unfeigned and adoring thanks. O help us, merciful Lord, to maintain our heavenly privilege, and to live in activity and simple love. May our knowledge of Thee be practical, in the fullest extent of the Christian privilege; and may our whole soul be animated by lively fervent purpose to glorify Thy name. Make us to flee youthful lusts, which war against the soul, and to live consistently with the distinction of being Thy anointed servants. Strengthen us against the snares and discouragements which arise out of an unbelieving heart, or from a disdainful world; and although we may be young, and in ourselves are wholly helpless, yet make us consistent, and give us the might that is promised as a covenant inheritance. Whenever we are exposed to temptation of any kind, O do Thou put us upon stirring up the gift that is in

us, so that we may triumph over the enemy, and fulfil our calling to Thy praise. Whether it be to pray, or read, or suffer, or labour, O grant that our confidence may be simple and unshaken ; so that we may demonstrate that we are *of God*, and that thou art our portion for ever. We wait for these and all Thy mercies, blessed Father, in Jesus Christ, our ever gracious Lord. Amen.

LYDIA

Acts xvi. 13—15.

OUR view of the travels of the apostle Paul gave us the opportunity of observing, in how many particular instances his labours were acknowledged to the salvation of souls ; the Holy Spirit bearing his faithful witness to the testimony of Jesus' cross. But a more minute attention to some of the characters, which are introduced to our notice, is due, than was given in Paul's life : and amongst these we may rank Lydia ; who affords us an interesting example of the divine grace and method in bringing sinners acquainted with the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. When Paul and his companions arrived at Philippi, they found not a synagogue of the Jews, but a small oratory by the river side where the Jews in that city were appointed to worship. How far they observed this privilege generally we know not, but thither many *women* resorted, and amongst them Lydia. This woman is supposed to have been of Gentile extraction, but proselyted to the Jewish religion ; her native city was Thyatira, but she resided at Philippi at the time when Paul preached there ; probably she had removed to this place for the furtherance of her worldly business ; she was a seller of purple. Her custom however, was to assemble with the people whom she had joined, and to worship the God of Israel. On one of these occasions she heard the testimony of the apostle, and by the blessing of the eternal Spirit, received it savingly into her heart, so that she was baptised into the faith of Jesus : her household also followed her example, or were presented by her for the

benefit of this ordinance; and the Christian faith was established under her roof. She now experienced that powerful influence, by which the true convert is brought to surrender all things to the Lord's possession and disposal; and intreated Paul and his companions, if they judged her faithful, to come and take up their abode in her house. With this wish they readily complied, and prosecuted their labours in Philippi, until, as we have seen, driven by persecution from this place. Ere the apostle and Silas departed, however, they visited Lydia as soon as brought out from their prison, as see verse 40, finding her, notwithstanding the violent measures of the enemies to truth, steadfast in the cause.

In Lydia we behold one of the examples of divine mercy with which the scriptures abound. By some unrecorded means, she was rescued from the ignorance of heathenism, as preparatory to the greater blessing of the knowledge of Messiah. According to the light she possessed, she appears to have acted with consistency, renouncing the abominations of the Gentiles, professing faith in Jehovah as the one only God, and associating herself with worshipping souls engaged in the profession of service to the Lord. Very few outward advantages seem to have been possessed by the little company assembled at Philippi, and very little opportunity for the advancement of Lydia in knowledge; but she found her spirit refreshed by thus joining the meetings for prayer, which were observed by the Jews; and in these probably she expected to rest as the whole of what she could look for, little anticipating the liberty and blessedness awaiting her through the ministry of Paul; and perhaps very little understanding any thing which related to the peculiarities of Messiah's kingdom. That the Lord had a people in Philippi

is evident by the success which was given to the labour of the apostle, who was instrumental to establish a precious church in that place. But Lydia seems to have been the first Christian convert ; she only is mentioned as having received the word effectually on the first address of the Christian ambassadors ; others of whom the Spirit afterwards testifies were added to her in process of time ; and Jesus was known by a little flock who delighted in and adhered to him with stedfast faith. It is said of Lydia that the *Lord opened her heart* that she *attended* unto the things which were spoken. There were many *hearers*, but she only at that time listened with saving application of the message : and this is described expressly as an effect following a sovereign act on the Lord's part, proving her to be a chosen vessel of mercy, in whom the everlasting purpose would be glorified. We should remark the fruits produced by this blessed operation ; Lydia was truly and deeply touched by the Holy Ghost ; those natural obstacles, which exist in a sinner's breast to the entrance of the gospel, were all omnipotently removed ; the bars and bolts of unbelief, prejudice, worldliness, or any other corruption, were now taken out of the way ; and by the omnipotent hand of the Lord her heart was thrown open that Jesus might enter in. This first great requisite, being secured, the after consequences were such as corresponded, and we contemplate the effect with admiration of the extensive work of the Spirit. A public and fearless acknowledgment of her conviction was immediately made. Whatever might be the result to herself, she was persuaded that her duty was unquestionable ; and with a heart that thoroughly entered into the blessedness of this duty, she stood forward as a confessor of Jesus, and a candidate for baptism. Her influence was also as promptly exerted in her

household ; and whether they were adults or children, which is not declared, they received this sign and ordinance ; hereby publicly avowing the faith of Christ. Towards the instrument of her conversion, her heart yearned with grateful affection, and towards the companions of his way she felt the bond of the Christian brotherhood ; these were now her acknowledged and beloved relations and friends ; and with true primitive simplicity she desired the privilege of demonstrating this affection. She consulted not for the perishing good of this world ; what she did possess was now at the Lord's service freely, lovingly ; and so far from feeling any ostentatious desire for the display of her own hospitality, or considering herself as conferring a favour upon them, she solicited their company as an obligation to herself, and asked it as a token of their confidence in her as a member of the same mystical body. Her language is that of courtesy combined with humility, simplicity, and a high reverence of the servants of the Lord, honouring them for their distinctions in him, and loving them as ambassadors of glad tidings to men. That her conversion was sincerely wrought by the Holy Ghost is further demonstrated, by the adherence of her soul to the newly embraced object of her faith, notwithstanding the tempest that blew. Persecution might have been dangerous at so early a period of her profession, but she was kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, and endured the trial of threatening evils with an unshaken love. The injured, insulted, and imprisoned witnesses were as welcome to her house in the midst of their affliction, as they were in the time of peace, and equally honoured ; for the word of their consolation was welcome to her heart. She now had learnt that heirs of glory are thus treated by Satan's slaves ; and that tribulation, so far from being an offence, is to be received

as part of the present *privilege* of such as are conformed to their Lord.

This little history contains in it some very interesting instructions; short as it is we find the divine counsels abundantly poured upon us through this medium; and to us it should be an important exercise, to reflect upon what is said of the operation in Lydia's heart, as descriptive of a work equally necessary to conversion in every instance. A sinner's heart is invariably *closed* against the Lord until opened by a divine operation. It is Satan's strong-hold, and all its goods are in his possession. This prince of darkness keeps his abode by an awful satanic influence, through which his power combines with man's infatuation, to render the captive a wretchedly deliberate servant of sin. Whatever may be proposed as excellent in God, or desirable to the soul, is received with distaste; the heart is closed by the love of sin, by preference to the service of Satan, who promises present and earthly delights, by strong prejudice against truth, and by pride of purpose, which makes the sinner obstinate in his own way, and ready to glory in his shame. We have decided examples of this in many scripture histories; we have seen them also in innumerable sinners under our own observation: and if we have been made acquainted with the evil nature which belongs to ourselves, we have affecting demonstration of the fact, in what has been developed in our own experience. This is the more affecting and awful, because it is not only the closing of the heart *by* adversaries, that will eventually make a prey of us, but it is against him, in whom, would we but open to receive him, the soul would possess its imperishable unspeakably satisfying portion, enriching it for ever. Alas! a heart closed by Satan and sin shuts out every thing truly good or

beneficial. The glorious holy Jehovah is barred out: Jesus the only Saviour is refused admittance: the Holy Ghost who is the ~~only~~ comforter, sanctifier, or peace, is resisted and grieved: and of course every present blessing, and the future heaven, are deliberately prohibited to draw near. Let us observe from this report of Lydia, that the awful existence of such a condition is not confined to the *heathen*, or to the openly *infamous*. She had already received a certain measure of light; she was a decent liver observing instituted means, and uniting professedly with others in prayer; yet *her* heart was closed until divinely influenced. So it is with all, notwithstanding advantages arising from education, light, or outward observances; every sinner's heart is shut against *the cross*, every corrupt principle of our nature urging a *relentless will* to exclude the thought of its humbling requirements, and to refuse admittance to a *crucified* Lord; Isa. liii. 1. Never will this miserable effect of the fall yield to any power short of the eternal purpose in Christ. The stubborn mind of man is not to be subdued, neither his affections to be moved by any argument, reasoning, or even conviction of the understanding; and revelation reveals to us the affecting source of deliverance—affecting, because so *free*, so *gracious*, so *loving*! flowing forth in the *redeeming* love of an omnipotent Saviour; Psalm cx. 3. It is by this covenant that the gospel is brought home in personal application—that faith is invincibly wrought in the soul—and that grace acts upon the will, gently reducing it to obedience and love. This is the work which produces that *attention* for which Lydia is remarkable, and which is so different from a mere hearing of the word, and from that vain curiosity which will give to many persons an *appearance* of being truly absorbed in what they hear, whilst the *affections* are at entire distance

from the Lord. The work of the Spirit begets an attention in which faith is operative, turns the mind upon the subject with an accompanying sense of its individual importance, and commends the blessed testimony as altogether suitable to a sinner's soul. When this is wrought, the effects which follow are such as we behold in Lydia; and since without this experience we are still in a lost and hopeless condition, we cannot do better than search our own hearts, and compare what we know of salvation with the grace that so decidedly appeared in her.

Jesus requires, that whosoever hopeth in his name, should make an open confession of the name, and of the hope; nothing can be more clear than this in the whole word of God: and it is important to observe, that he also produces in his people a disposition which corresponds with the requirement. Love is a constraining affection of the soul, which when fixed on Jesus, will not allow the spirit to rest, until his name and interests are avowed before men. He who has possession of the heart, must be known to be its Lord and life; nor will the true believer experience any of that peace which he covets, until he is seen amongst the Saviour's friends, and bear the cross conspicuously on his brow. Hence it is that we always perceive how the conflict, doubts, fears, and reasonings sometimes agitating the new convert, cease not, but in the determination to come out and be separate from the world, uniting with the saints; and that in proportion to the ready obedience given to this demand of love, is the season of internal rest in the Lord, immediate or otherwise. A faith that is sincere will acknowledge the Lord's people under all circumstances. Towards these a true convert feels indescribable drawings of affection, especially to such as are most eminent in advancing Jesus' kingdom, or

who have been instrumental to his saving change. This attraction is owing to the participation of the soul in the same divine spirit, by whom a peculiar relationship is established and realized amongst the redeemed. It is a pledge of their final unison when the Lord shall have perfected his Church ; and a comfort in time, serving to cement their hearts and interests, and to render them mutually useful to each other. This family interest lives above all the storms, persecutions, and scorn stirred up by an ungodly world, and will break forth in its greatest purity and loveliness, when difficulties most abound. Nor is there any thing which is withheld ; house, substance, sympathy, are disinterestedly given ; not by constraint, but by the free outgoings of a believing heart. Such are the effects of having a heart opened by the Lord, to attend unto the things spoken in the gospel ; and as Lydia professed her faith, and surrender in humility, counting the favour *hers*, when saints confessed her faithful, so will it be with us ; we shall esteem ourselves distinguished by this fellowship, and receive it as a token that we are one with Christ.

Let us rejoice if this be our lot, and proffer to our God the never-ceasing strain of grateful praise. And let us be encouraged by this example, to carry the word of the gospel into regions most unpromising, love the little assemblies where a few, perhaps despised ones, meet together to pray, and be thankful if but one elect soul is found in the midst of those who shall attend to the gospel message ; whilst yet *we hope* for more, trusting that one convert may be the first-fruits, promising an abundant harvest, and giving the pledge of what the Spirit is about to effect. These are precious exercises of the life of faith, and are acceptable to him in whose work of love we profess to be engaged.

PRAYER.

O most gracious and merciful Lord and Saviour, we humbly meet together at this time with the desire of receiving a blessing from Thee; and since Thou wast in the midst of the little assemblies of whom we have been reading, and didst there open the heart of a poor sinner to attend to the word of life, we trust that again Thou wilt so work, and in mercy operate in our hearts. O may we be found under Thy gracious government, and blest with deliverance from Satan's power; may the dominion of sin be taken away, and our will, and mind, and heart confess Thy salvation, and give Thee room in our breast. It is from Thee, O Lord, that these blessings proceed; therefore we ask them with earnest prayers. O do not deny the request of our lips, but impart the liberty after which we are sighing day by day. We are abased and humbled, when we think of the awful state of bondage to every evil in which we have lived, and how we have flattered ourselves with acceptance before Thee, without having affections reconciled to Thy will. Justly mightest Thou have cut us off in our ignorance, or now leave us to the effect of our ignorance; but Thou art a merciful God, delighting to show compassion; and all Thy purposes overflow with love in a crucified Saviour. On this ground we now plead with Thee; on this foundation we now build before Thee; O Lord God Almighty, receive us in Jesus, and make us happy in Him. Come into our souls with all the fulness of redemption; and be Thou pleased, Lord, to impart the consolation of an assured interest in Thee. We pray for such a powerful baptism of the Holy Ghost, as may be attended with a holy courage to confess Thee in all situations and all society. O may we always

evinced that we consider Thy saints our dear and near bonds in the Lord ; and that we are ready to own them in prisons, in stripes, and oppressions ; and give us a sense of the *privilege* that is bestowed upon us, when we are so united and owned by them. We wait before Thee for the perfecting of Thy own work within us ; O Lord, fulfil all Thy good pleasure in and by us ; for Thy Name's sake in Jesus our only Lord. Amen.

THE JAILOR.

Acts xvi. 23—36.

IN the affecting record which the Lord has granted to us respecting the wonders of his grace to men, we may consider the example of the Jailer at Philippi one of the most interesting, since it presents such clear demonstrations of the Saviour's power, and sovereign love to wretched sinners. It appears that the sufferings of the church, and of individuals, were continually used as instrumental to the furtherance of the gospel; the minds of men being arrested by the evidently supernatural existence exhibited by Christians; and the various countries or regions, into which the persecuted followers of Jesus were scattered, being by their persecution made acquainted with the doctrines for which they suffered. This is remarkably seen in the case before us. Paul and Silas being by order of the magistrates in Philippi condemned to scourging, and committed to imprisonment, the Lord interposed by miracle to manifest their divine mission, sending, as we have seen in our former view of this chapter, an earthquake by which the foundations of the prison were shaken, the doors opened, and every one's bands loosed. The shock of the earthquake awoke the jailor from his sleep; who seeing the prison doors opened, immediately concluded that the prisoners had made their escape; and fearing that he should be called to an account for this, as having neglected his charge, he instantly resolved upon escaping this peril, by putting an end to his existence. He drew his sword and was in the act of falling upon it, when Paul cried out, and arrested his desperate purpose

by assuring him his prisoners were still within his reach. By this address a new current was given to his awakened fears ; he began to tremble for the state of his immortal soul, and to apprehend a more terrible judgment at the Almighty bar, than that which had the moment before agitated him respecting human power ; and springing in before the Apostle and his companions, he fell on his knees, and entreated them to tell him what he must do to be saved. The answer was simple but comprehensive of all that is requisite to eternal life ; he was bid to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and assured that in so doing he should be saved. The welcome direction was received in obedience and trust ; he and all his household were baptised. And the joy of salvation was attended with its sanctifying effect ; his affections were opened towards the servants of the Lord ; he washed their stripes, endeavouring to administer what relief was in his power, and gladly informed them of the command sent by the magistrates to let them go. Thus he was added to the number of those in Philippi who received the word savingly, and whose heart the Lord opened, as he had done that of Lydia.

The natural character of the man appears to have been unfeeling and savage ; to this disposition his situation as a jailor gave opportunities for action ; and probably he was thus confirmed in his natural propensities. In his conduct to Paul and Silas it is evident that he indulged this disposition. The command of the magistrates was to keep them safe in custody, but he is described as gladly meeting the permission, and as expressing his own satisfaction in the sentence. The wounded and bleeding condition of these disciples made no impression upon his heart ; with pitiless barbarity he thrust them into the inner prison, and fastened

their feet in the stocks, thus adding more positive pain to that already inflicted, and going to the utmost extent, even if he did not exceed, of what the order of the magistrates countenanced. It is also most likely that he participated with others in the enmity felt against the gospel; and that, in addition to the general expression of his character, he had the particular excitement arising from this spirit towards Christians. No relentings of natural feeling or conscience troubled him; he retired to his bed and slept as soundly as if there were nothing worthy of his care or thought; and left his prisoners to their fate, without considering whether or not they suffered justly, or what was the nature of that doctrine which had given such offence to his fellow townsmen. The desperate act upon which he was rushing, when the voice of mercy reached him, is a proof of the infidelity and hardness of his heart upon religious subjects. He had no dread of eternity, no sense of the justice of the Almighty, nor any hesitation in the disposal of his own life, but with ignorance and infatuation was ready to rush upon the vengeance of Jehovah, in order to escape from an imaginary evil, or an endurance of temporary punishment from the arm of man. An extraordinary degree of darkness and insensibility is displayed by this man; for even the miracle of the earthquake did not in any degree reach his conscience. He had no thought of God in this wonderful witness to the saints: the only feelings which agitated him referred to the things of time, and sense, and bodily sufferings; and it is probable he considered this convulsion of the earth only as a natural effect of causes, which had nothing to do with immediate divine operations. Thus, without any application of the warning to the particular interests of the gospel or of its ambassadors, his reasonings were simply these, that a partial earthquake

had been felt, that it had particularly affected the prison, that it had liberated the prisoners, and that in consequence he should be required to suffer for letting them escape; these were the reflections of a *natural* man, but were evidences of a hard obdurate heart. The change wrought in him was evidently subsequent to the first alarm that seized his breast, and appears to have been produced through the zealous and disinterested address of the Apostle, the Holy Ghost entering his conscience through that medium, and implanting an instant conviction of the superiority of the spirit manifested by the Apostle, of the evident *miracle* which the earthquake now appeared, and of the authority by which the prisoners had spoken their messages in the city. But the work reached further than to the judgment, the affections were awakened into action; an earnest desire for personal salvation was prevalent in his soul, and all other subjects and interests were lost in the one great concern of being rescued from everlasting misery, and made a partaker of spiritual security. This combination of new feelings soon expressed itself by a respectful acknowledgment of the very persons whom a few hours since he had utterly despised, by an earnest solicitude to be instructed in doctrines which he had in the first watches of that very night set at nought and blasphemed, and in a tenderness of sympathy to which the heart of this man had hitherto been awfully a stranger, putting his hands upon the unwonted employment of bathing the stripes of the afflicted. His faith was attended with immediate internal liberty; he listened to the further instruction of the Apostle with an opened understanding and rejoicing soul, receiving Jesus in all his fulness for a free and complete salvation; and demonstrating his heartfelt devotion, not only by the gladness of his own heart, but by the zealous expression

of love and charity, to the souls of all beneath his roof; bringing them to the ordinance of baptism, and placing them before the Christian missionaries as subjects for their teaching, and trusting to find them vessels of the divine mercy. It is delightful thus to contemplate in characters of every description, and in dispositions of every cast, the triumphs of Jesus' cross—the omnipotence with which he carries on his rule—and the unquestionable evidences which he effects in those changed and sanctified monuments of grace, that he is pleased to present before men.

Well may we rejoice in the introduction of the blessed gospel of peace, even in its influence upon the present condition of sinners; and unfeignedly should the tribute of praise arise to him from whom these healing streams so abundantly flow. If we seriously contemplate the state of man whilst destitute of this blessing, or look into the contrast exhibited when it is possessed, we shall attain to some idea of the unspeakable advantages which are the result, to the temporal and natural concerns and connections in which men are placed. It is an awful consideration, that our fellow creatures are untimely hurried by crime into prisons, cells, and a state of condemnation, induced by their trespass against wholesome law; and we can scarcely look into such scenes of depravity and misery without feeling a pang in our breast, and bewailing the tendency of our nature to act in revolt and with disorder, and to pass from one stage of offence to another until reduced to this wretched extremity. Were the holy gospel known by sinners with a personal application, our prisons would be *solitudes*, crime would not shock the eye and ear, as it now does. *Love*, the sweet principle of the new creation would pervade the human breast, and order, peace, and sanctity would pre-

vail. Alas ! we look not for this in its full extent, until the reign of millenium blessedness shall cover the earth with righteousness ; but we may labour to diffuse an increase of this ameliorating influence ; and should do what we can to check the torrent of vice, and to bring men under the sound of gospel holiness. It is, further, a very affecting consideration, that amongst those who have the charge of prisons, or who are constituted the executioners of the civil law, there is seldom found a man whose heart is really imbued with the kingdom of Jesus. Jailors are too often like the man before us in his natural state ; they may differ in the degree of their constitutional feelings of pity, &c. ; but usually their duties are discharged as acts belonging to their appointment, without the recollection of the demands which a fellow creature has in *every* situation to the compassion of a fellow sinner, or to the counsel which their miserable state requires. Perhaps we may here be inclined to observe, that few men of quick feelings, or of devoted habits, would choose to occupy stations of this kind. But this is a consideration which *adds* to the picture of misery presented by a prison ; and could the servants of Jesus Christ so far deny themselves, as not to shrink from such a painful responsibility, perhaps there can scarcely be supposed a situation affording more opportunity for the manifestation of the best affections before God and man. A Christian so situated, and possessed of a good judgment, would know how to discriminate in cases, how to mitigate affliction where it might be, and how to address to such as were on the borders of eternity a word of solemn and affectionate instruction. Thus he might become a missionary of the most important description. Neither would his employers have reason to complain, for Christian sympathy is not opposed to necessary discipline. The believer accepts the

laws as requisite for the punishment of vice, and knows that the 'magistrate bears not the sword in vain. And sincerely might we all as members of the community rejoice, were the gospel's hallowing influence found pervading the breasts of Jailors and keepers of prisons; so that these sad dwellings of vice might not be as a cage of imprisonment to wild beasts, and destitute of any consideration but the bare infliction of a sentence on man's body—but become places of restraint upon the vicious, conducted with an attention to them as rational and immortal creatures, and an wholesome occasion for calling upon men to reflect and prepare to meet their God. If the Jailer at Philippi retained his station, he no doubt would be one of those, who, having experienced spiritual liberty from the prison of sin and hell, would address to those, who in future were given to his charge, words that would savour of the interests of eternity.

The history of this man affords also another lesson of great importance, not only by showing us how unjustly a sentence of stripes and imprisonment may be inflicted, but how much the man who suffers innocently should endeavour to manifest a different spirit to that of a conscious criminal; especially if the trial arises for conscience' sake, and is endured as an expression of man's enmity to the gospel, faith should be in vigorous action, so as to enable the believer to show forth the wonderful power of gospel principles, even under circumstances of the most aggravated trouble. The conduct and spirit of a saint, under affliction, will frequently do more towards shaking the foundation of Satan's empire, than any thing by which the *senses* only are addressed; for these speak to a man's judgment and conscience; and the Lord will frequently attend them with a persuasive grace, which wins upon and captivates the heart. There is no character however desperate in disposition or

conduct of whom we should despair. Grace is sovereign, and it is invincible. He, who so wrought upon the jailor by Paul and Silas, can do so to our most cruel foe, if it please him; and since a believer does not *treat* any man as his foe, but overcomes evil with good, we must remember to maintain a ready disposition towards evincing this in whatever situation of outward affliction we may be placed, ere we quit this mortal scene. Our souls being embued with the precious unction of the Holy Ghost, we shall have many affecting considerations which will open our sympathies towards the lost and insensible sinner; and, in fact, our very sufferings will become welcome visitations of mercy, if through them any degree of spiritual blessing is conveyed to an immortal soul.

Let us be increasingly impressed with the ruinous insensibility that prevails, to harden and infatuate poor souls. Alas! we perceive the fact in examples that we may say run parallel with the case of the jailor. The most awful visitations have been sent, similar to the earthquake by which the prison shook; convulsive providences have shaken a man in his family, in his country, in his own feelings; yet they have not produced any saving effect! In some instances they have driven the sufferer to desperation, not unfrequently suggesting the horrible expedient of evading human griefs, or impending evils, by plunging into the crime of self-murder; causing this frightful development of an atheistic or deceived nature; and proving, with all man's boasted greatness and independence, that he is so far a slave to earth, as to venture even eternity itself with all its terrors, rather than encounter disgrace or suffering here. Since we have incontrovertible examples of this kind, let us not deny the truth, but rather admit the necessity of receiving along with these troubles that effectual

grace which sanctifies them, and by which they are made introductory to better fears, more saving tremblings, and more spiritual solicitude! The scriptures shew us plainly that such an inward experience is necessary; we must be brought to a sight and sense of sin, occasioned by spiritual perceptions, and producing holy anxiety to be saved. The first idea which presents itself is, that something must be *done* in order to obtain this salvation, and the language of the jailor is sometimes the painful attendant upon the awakened sinner many a sorrowful day, whilst he is still saying "What must I *do*?" Happy therefore is it when some wise instructor is sought, who is able to relieve the inquirer by a simple revelation of the gospel method, in which One, who *has done* all that merits salvation for man, is proposed, and in whose sufferings and obedience, remission and justification are revealed. The acceptance of this doctrine will produce peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; and as it is *purifying*, it will also produce sorrow for acts done in native enmity to the gospel, efforts to remedy the evil; and pour balm into the inflicted wounds, and that spirit of fellowship with the saints as rejoices in their joys and renders the soul henceforth susceptible of all their interests. Let us seek these influences without delay; knowing that a last earthquake will come, shaking creation, and casting down also this mortal tabernacle. Let us seek the spiritual liberty *now*, which will then be perfected in our eternal flight from all present cares, fears, and sins! In this condition we are possessed of unspeakable privileges, and shall eternally celebrate his praise, who rescues the sinner, and has saved us by grace.

PRAYER.

O most blessed and merciful Saviour, we humbly cast ourselves upon the riches of redeeming love, and come to Thee as the Helper of the miserable and guilty, beseeching that we may experience in our own behalf the interposition of Thy grace and succour. We are in a state of awful bondage by nature; and what is worse, we are in a state of stupid indifference to our ruin; so that, unless we are quickened by Thee, no judgments, no terrors, will bring us into a just sense of what we ought to feel and be. When we look back upon the paths we have trod, and call to mind the many dispensations which have been to us or our families and connexions, like the shock of an earthquake, convulsing every feeling, or threatening every possession, we are ashamed at the ignorance in which we remained—of our disposition, and of our continued forgetfulness, both of the affliction and of the deliverance. By these things we learn experimentally that unless Thou art the sanctifying Lord, who will use our afflictions as instruments to our salvation, they cannot and they do not produce in us any good thing. We therefore humbly pray that Thy Spirit may come in the purpose of covenant love, and that we may be softened and subdued, and brought to the prostration of our souls before Thy mercy seat. We desire to manifest the change wrought in us, by fruits that proceed from faith, and to be enriched by the application of Thy blood and merit; so as to deliver us from condemnation, and to make us also joyful in the liberty of a justified state. O in tender mercy free us from all bondage, make us cheerfully simple, in our acceptance of the gospel life, and to perceive its fulness for the security of the soul in time and in eternity. And, O Lord,

enable us with the blessed sense of forgiveness and fellowship with Thee, to fill every future responsibility as unto our God: in every situation endeavouring to spread the influence of the blessed Gospel, so as to win others both by example and precept to inquire after Thee. O thus sanctify all Thy ways to us; thus bless us in the operation of Thy indwelling love, and bind our hearts to Thee, as our life, our Lord, and our exceeding joy, through Jesus the only Saviour. Amen.

GALLIO.

Acts xviii. 12—17.

GALLIO is reported to have been brother to the celebrated Seneca the philosopher, and is said to have been adopted into another family, receiving his name from the adopter. He was promoted to the office of Proconsul of Achaia, by Claudius the Roman Emperor ; he continued in this station some time ; but partaking of the reverses which usually belonged to persons in such offices, he was removed, and again in the reign of Nero put into the same situation ; but his patron, it is said, soon withdrew all his favour from him, and caused him to be put to death. His character in profane history is given in very amiable terms ; he is described as mild and courteous. The Scriptures present him to us only in one transaction, where Paul's persecuted course brings him into notice ; for on the occasion when insurrection was made by the Jews in Corinth against the Apostle, he was violently dragged by the mob before the judgment-seat of Gallio, being accused of teaching men to worship God contrary to the law. The Jews probably expected that Gallio would enter into their views ; for his mild character, which rendered him a friend to toleration, had afforded them a protection and countenance which they did not usually experience. But they mistook his disposition, he had no favour to them on a religious ground, and their matters of dispute were to him perfectly indifferent and contemptible ; he therefore with some indignation drove them from the judgment-seat. The Jews retired ; but this tumult ended in a new commotion stirred up by the

Greeks, who took this occasion for expressing *their* abhorrence of Christians ; and seizing upon Sosthenes, who seems to have been a convert, see 1 Cor. i. 1, they beat him violently before the judgment-seat, " But Gallio cared for none of these things."

There were some very amiable traits in this character. In respect of mere temporal concerns, it is an excellence to be mild and forbearing and kind in disposition and deportment ; and is frequently the means of producing many enjoyments to others, which the more turbulent spirit destroys. Gallio likewise avowedly hated the spirit of persecution, and the character of a persecutor ; and considered his authority as vested in his hand for the purpose of repressing vice, and not for the settling of theological disputes. In fulfilment of this duty, he looked upon himself as bound to interfere in all matters of immorality. This was a part of his responsibility, and it was reasonable that he should meet it ; and so far he seems to have performed his part with rectitude and diligence. Yet in the instance recorded in God's word, there was an inconsistency even with these principles ; for according to his own explanation of what he considered matters coming under his cognizance, this insurrection against Paul was one. It was surely a matter of *wicked wrong* to make this tumult, and to rise up against an individual in this tumultuous spirit, and to presume to beat an uncondemned man, insolently defying the civil power, and daring to continue the public disorder. And if it was the duty of Gallio to exert his authority for punishing vice, it was equally so to interpose for the rescue of the innocent. His conduct was therefore highly reprehensible in a merely moral point of view, demonstrating a sinful indifference to the case of the oppressed, and a

partial mind in the execution of his duties. It is by comparing the whole of a man's character together, and by examining one disposition in connection with another, that we arrive at some certainty respecting his spirit and moving principles : and in the present instance we are by this method immediately enabled to detect in Gallio's apparent moderation, and tolerating measures, not the mere exercise of amiable disposition, but the mixture of a foul spirit of atheistic indifference to religion. His conduct towards Paul is a sufficient evidence of this corrupt spring. He treats the whole matter of dispute as a subject beneath his investigation, or a quarrel about names and words, and a superstitious law, all well enough for the occupation of a few bigotted Jews, but to reasonable philosophers perfectly contemptible, and, as his speech intimates, below his *reason*. Thus we see how necessary it is, ere we form our opinion of men, to view their motives as well as their actions, so far as they may be discoverable through an acquaintance with human nature ; and that no just estimate can be made of man as he appears *before God*, but by taking the Scriptures for a light and guide. The gentle Gallio, so highly *esteemed* by man, is very differently to be viewed, when brought to this light ; and, perhaps, in no one instance will the profane and the sacred page be found more diametrically opposed in their testimony, than in what respects the character of Gallio.

In applying this example to the history of our own times, we shall be speedily convinced of the innumerable instances of the same description with which we are surrounded. Philosophy and reason, and a boasted spirit of liberality, are idols in the human mind ; and when combined with a decent exterior, apparent zeal for good order, and

activity in the discharge of public duties, especially when a courteous and gentle manner is the medium through which their views and actions are exhibited, they form a delusive picture, which the world calls beautiful and excellent. There are many men of this description, who possess the general good will of their fellow creatures, and who consider themselves bound to maintain it by every *reasonable* attention to the claims of morality ; yet, if they come under the examination of the Bible rule of morality, they will be found ruinously defective. Their estimate of moral claims is very partial and limited ; on many occasions it is under the dominion of strong prejudice, and sometimes is wholly negligent upon points of the utmost importance to the well-being of society.

From men of this description, we may expect to find that apathy and indifference to the cause of religion, of which Gallio was guilty ; and usually, not as an effect of *unconscious* aversion to the subject, but in a proud inclination to *boast* of that indifference. They flatter themselves that there is *excellence* in this their superiority to the *prejudice of education*, and to the *superstition* of men : and thinking that they are privileged to tower above the ignorant and contemptible multitude, they look upon their sentiments with complacency, and determine upon maintaining an entire separation from the discussion of these questions, which agitate what *they* suppose to be the *deluded* minds of men. The atheistic scorn of religious questions, they excuse to such as presume to condemn their proceedings, by affirming that they consider them *unmeaning*, not essential to a man's happiness or religion, and therefore better contemned by silence and separation ; they will not *persecute* or oppose others who choose this amusement to their minds, but as for them-

selves, they are resolved to care for none of these things. Is it not manifest to us that the world is full of such characters, and that every age has produced its thousands of Gallios, indeed, so common is the presentation of this atheistic spirit, that it is a usual and often repeated phrase, as descriptive of such men, "they are *Gallio* like."

The guilt that is annexed to such a spirit, is of the most aggravated description. It decidedly marks an *infidel* mind; and as it ensues upon merciful opportunities which have been afforded for information, it demonstrates native enmity against God, and that wicked *loathing* of the Almighty, which alas (awful as is such a case) is too general in the hearts of men. It also belongs to exceeding pride and arrogance of soul, which puts the impotent sinner upon *rivalry* against the Lord; for in rejecting *revelation* he adopts *reason*; and in turning his back upon the counsels of heaven, raises up for himself a dictator invested with sovereign authority, out of his own narrow judgment and power of discernment. In this respect, therefore, there is condemning sin of the foulest description, and an agreement with Satan in the deeds of arrogant defiance of the Lord. The punishment due to such impious contempt of the divine voice is great, and will descend; for God is an avenging judge, whose long-protracted execution of wrath upon his foes will at length arrive, and smite into utter desolation the pride of the scorner, and the scoff of the infidel. And when we examine the nature of the offence, and look into the amazing wonders of that all-important subject which is thus contemned, we are not surprised that Jehovah has prepared his most dreadful weapons against the man who is corrupted in this crime. That the theme of revelation is worthy man's care, is demonstrated by the extent of care which the eternal God has manifested in it.

It contains a testimony wherein Jehovah has abounded in parental care for miserably lost and helpless souls, in which he has arranged an everlasting purpose that is to elevate the souls of men into friendship, and into the fruition of himself, wherein he has secured his purpose through the wonders of the incarnation, sufferings, and mysterious victories of the everlasting Son, and wherein he has promised to come in the grace of a covenant deliverer from sin, from Satan, and from all condemnation ;—purposes proposed, executed, and secured by Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit, and all designed to issue in the endless glory of his own blessed name. What must we say of the disposition of a sinner, who, notwithstanding this lavish consideration on God's part for the happiness and redemption of man, has a hard and impious indifference to the whole, caring for none of these things ! That it is a theme well worthy the thought of the wretched wanderer through this evil world, may be understood by the care which *angels* express towards it. These heavenly spirits perceive its matchless grace, admire the manifestation of their God in this mysterious plan for the creatures of a fallen race, and *rejoice* in its revelation and in its fruits ; for this they sing another song of praise to their eternal Jehovah, and are perpetually busied in bringing new tributes before the throne, as they are constantly beholding Messiah's victories in behalf of redeemed men. That they have kindred minds from amongst the inhabitants of the earth is evident ; for many are the faithful souls who know their God, and in whose hearts there existeth no object of equal love, or desire as to the Saviour of their souls. In him they behold the beloved, suffering, triumphant, and unshaken friend, who has cared for them in their lost estate, and on whose tender compassion they have lived from day to day. All which regards this friend,

is dear and important to them ; and the infidel and sceptic have seen that they so cared for their Lord, as that they could die for him. He, who with such a cloud of witnesses around him is Gallio like, caring for none of these things, is a wretched hell-bound slave, detained in the chains of darkness, and infatuated to his own destruction. Oh, let him reflect how *condemned* souls are *constrained* to care. Let him consider how he can endure, when experimentally made to feel the madness of his indifference, and the importance of the question on which salvation turned. In the future world he will understand, that there has been more in revelation than questions of *words* and *names* : that in this testimony was contained the *omnipotent purpose*, and the manifestation of divine glory, which, if not known in the recovering mercy of the blood of the covenant, will be proved in the endurance of the wrath of the Lamb. How much better, how much wiser, is the part of giving a timely and humble investigation to these interesting concerns : and how much more genuine is that elevation of mind which is derived from the appropriation of these supernatural truths. O let us each retire into our own breasts with seriousness ; and even, if hitherto we have cared for the things of Christ, be stimulated by these examples to “ give the more earnest heed to these, lest at any time we let them slip ; ” and lest there should be any measure of that native infidelity remaining in us, by which the life of vigorous faith might be impaired. In a little time we shall all come to the close of every thing in this world for which we have cared so much. Its pleasures, its burdens, and all its interests will fade away for ever, and we, on our death-bed, shall find that none of these possessions have been worthy the proportion of solicitude they have awakened in our hearts, and that our most precious streams of comfort derived

from the creature cannot thus impart refreshment to the soul. Neither will the high conceit of the atheist, or the proud independence of the reasoner, or the cold calculations of the philosopher, have power to warm the chilling heart with one reviving thought. These have been adversaries to the brighter hopes revealed in the gospel, and have left eternity as the dismal blank before the eye, where no record of opening mercy can be read, and where even *reason now* begins to dread that there *may* be found records demanding wrath. What reason so anticipates, a few moments perhaps will give the departing soul to verify ; and in the region of everlasting despair, the bitter anguish of the soul, for having during the time of probation, “cared for none of these things,” will seize and devour its prey with relentless persistence. Let us then live on our guard against “vain philosophy.” Watch diligently against sceptical indifference. Pray fervently for a spirit of devotion to the cause of the Lord, and embrace the gospel with affections that delight in its truth.

PRAYER.

O ETERNAL and most gracious God, we humbly beseech Thee to impart to our souls those divine operations which flow from the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and that we may approach unto Thee in the blessed experience of Thy reconciliation and justifying merit. O Lord, vouchsafe to win our love to Thyself, by revealing Thy great glory, and sending the Holy Ghost into our hearts. By his indwelling power bring us out of the bondage of our lusts, and let no corruption have any place or power within our breasts. O that we may confess Thee in a vital and lively union of our souls with Thyself, and be privileged to feel and

know that we have an abiding inheritance in Thee. Dispositions such as these, O Lord, are produced by no power short of Thy own omnipotence ; no human means, no efforts of our own, can deliver us from that fatal indifference to spiritual truths, which we see so conspicuously forming a chief characteristic among men. We know that we have natures equally prone to the sin of practical infidelity, equally disposed to the spirit of scorning, or to the indolence of a heart that seeks repose in any thing short of the life of faith. Who shall deliver us, who shall strengthen us, who shall preserve us, but only Thou, O Lord God ! for vain is the help of man, and impotent every endeavour that is made in human strength. O listen to us whilst we direct our earnest supplications to thy mercy-seat, and thus invoke Thy presence ; hearken to us whilst we thus implore Thee for the covenant gifts that are laid up in Jesus ; and O bestow upon us such a living care for the things that belong to salvation, as shall be abundantly practical in all the fruits of devotion. May we receive benefit from the example that has been presented before us at this time, and be moved seriously to meditate upon the awful condition of all those who tread in such steps. And whilst we deprecate such judgments as await the impenitent despiser, O make us vigorously devoted to the paths which glorify Thee. All these blessings we humbly beseech Thee to give us, in Jesus Christ our ever blessed Lord. Amen.

APOLLOS.

Acts xviii. 24.

APOLLOS presents us an interesting subject of inquiry, on account of the grace of the Lord bestowed upon him, both in respect of natural talent and ministerial devotion. His circumstances were also, in some respects, different from those of most of the public witnesses and ministers of truth, at the period when he first appears before us. He was zealously engaged in proclaiming the truth, so far as he was acquainted with its nature and end; but as yet he had received no information upon the peculiar doctrines contained in the revelation and gospel of Jesus Christ. He was by birth a Jew, and possessed a very extensive acquaintance with the Hebrew scriptures. By some means, which is not related, he became acquainted also with the testimony of John Baptist, and had learnt that repentance was called for by Jehovah, and that Jesus was the Lamb of God taking away sin. Here his spiritual perceptions seem to have been bounded. He, probably with many others, had left Jerusalem previously to the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and had not obtained those clear visions with which the general body of believers was blest on that occasion. What he did know, however, he industriously taught, having a disposition full of fervour, and peculiar powers as an eloquent speaker. It pleased the Lord to direct his steps to Ephesus at the time when Aquila and Priscilla were there. These persons were of Hebrew descent, and their former place of residence was Rome; but by the order of Claudius, who had given commandment for all

Jews to quit Rome, they were obliged to leave their abode; and, as we find by the first and second verses, came first to Corinth, where they were closely associated with Paul, with whom they afterwards sailed, as verses 18 and 19, where they were left by the apostle, who proceeded to Jerusalem. Apollos no sooner arrived in Ephesus, than he entered as usual into the synagogue of the Jews, and boldly testified of those things which his soul had embraced. Aquila and Priscilla were there, and when they heard him, they clearly perceived both his powers and his defect in knowledge, and with great zeal and Christian affection invited him to their house, and instructed him more perfectly in the way of God. Having received this increase of light, his heart burned to impart the blessing to others; and being disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren recommended him to the disciples in that region, where he laboured with great effect, proving a great support and blessing to such as had already been called by grace, and an able advocate for the faith in Jesus, publicly disputing with, and mightily convincing the Jews, that Jesus had fulfilled what the scriptures had proclaimed of their expected Messiah. We afterwards find Apollos frequently mentioned in the same point of view, always as affectionately associated with the saints, and ably testifying of Jesus, especially in Corinth, where he was in high estimation with the church. We have no scripture account of his *particular* labours: he seems to have been much called to the work of building up, or ministering to souls already instructed in the word, and Paul speaks of him as *watering* the good seed which he had planted, by which it would seem that his eloquent addresses fell like refreshing showers upon the earth, and added beauty and verdure to the spiritual productions of the kingdom.

Apollon, considered as a natural character, is to be ranked amongst those who are formed by special mercy to fill high and responsible situations. He possessed great mental energies, vigorous penetration, fervour of affection, and powerful utterance. His attention was probably given to the Hebrew scriptures, as affording him a delightful subject, on which his elevated mind could feed amongst the sublimest wonders, and his glowing affections be suitably addressed with all that tenderness, pathos, and interests of the most animating kind could produce or propose. In this respect, he would find in the sacred writings every thing calculated to gratify his understanding and heart. We know, however, that all this might be experienced without any *spiritual* perceptions in the doctrines which respect the salvation of a sinner. The testimony of John Baptist seems to have first roused him to an understanding of the Scriptures, in this individual application of their contents, and to have turned his thoughts upon the person of Jesus of Nazareth, as the substance of the promises made in these scriptures to man; but a veil was still upon his understanding, and he saw through a glass darkly. His natural talents however were sanctified, through regeneration, to the Lord's service; and he was ready to consecrate all his powers to the advancement of those interests which he considered connected with the glory of God and the welfare of his own nation. Thus the Lord had visited him with the divine mercy, and entered upon his soul in the grace of sanctification. Instruction was given—inward power accompanied the word—scriptures were in some degree unfolded—and heavenly truth embraced by *the heart*. That this influence was unfeigned is evident from the course on which he entered, in which boldness, zeal and diligence attended his testimony. His brethren were exhorted to re-

pentance, sinners were called upon to listen to the voice of the Spirit, and once more the voice of John Baptist seemed as it were to echo through the wilderness of this world, and bid the inhabitants of Judea to behold their long-expected Lord. The great truths of which he was ignorant were probably those which respect the nature of the atonement, justification, mystical union with Christ, and the nature of Jesus' widely extended empire, which is to embrace all lands and climes. These were particulars which it belonged to the office of the Holy Ghost specially to reveal, and in which Apollos had yet to be taught. His heart being under divine influence, he was prepared to receive the further instruction. He was humble and teachable, and, although himself a teacher, listened to with mute attention, possessed of talents calculated to ensure popularity, and animated by a burning ardour which is not unfrequently attended with a scorn of restraint from others; he meekly listened to the overtures of the more private Christian, gratefully received the aid they proffered him, and with a beautiful lowliness of heart and mind embraced the blessed counsels of his more experienced friends. We may readily surmise with what new fervour his bosom would now burn, and how, from the increasingly illumined page, his mind and soul would receive new motives to action; in obedience to which he would go forth on his Christian mission, and elevate the cross with an eloquence unknown before. And well may we understand what would be the holy joy of his faithful teachers, when they beheld the success of their efforts in his behalf, and how the eternal Spirit had replenished this vessel of mercy for the benefit of the redeemed church.

Subjects like these are rendered practical, by selecting from them those particular parts which

bear more especially upon the times or the circumstances in which we are likely to be placed. We may profit by the short record which refers to Apollos, if we examine his dispositions with a desire of imitation, or look to his talents as gifts imparted by the Lord. *Natural talent* is in all its forms or degrees the gift of God; and in respect of this, we may take up the apostle's words, and say, "Hath he not power of the same lump to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour?" He who frameth all creation, and furnishes it as one great habitation, places in it according to his own sovereignty, vessels of gold, or silver, or of wood, or of earth, 2 Tim. ii. 20. And if we see in others, or feel in ourselves, any possession wherein we are made to differ from a brother less gifted, the whole of the distinction must be resolved into the work of divine power, independently of any act or volition on our own part. Great natural talents, however, are not always sanctified to the glory of their Author, nor exercised to the good of the possessor: for being *only* natural, they participate in that sentence of death which sin has introduced into our nature; they are held in a heart naturally alienated from God, and are frequently awfully abused, to the destruction of souls and the disturbance of peace, so that we see many a wretched sinner so infatuated by the prince of darkness whom he serves, that the very talents which God has bestowed are used as weapons wherewith the rebel wars against the Giver. We also know that natural talent is frequently passed by in the choice of spiritual ambassadors of the gospel, because the Lord is pleased to choose base things and things despised, that the excellency of the power in the conversion of souls may be clearly his own; so that on no account have we the smallest countenance given to vanity—to inordinate estimation of eloquence,

influence, or human power ; the appeal is now as ever, " Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed *even as the Lord gave* to every man." O that this were carefully remembered by us all, to the correction of that over anxiety for popular gifts, or that fond delight with which men are apt to follow the preacher only because of the loveliness of the tones in which the theme of salvation is poured upon their ear. Not that we are to undervalue any of these distinctions, when the Lord bestows and sanctifies them ; for they are great instruments in his hand, and will frequently be the means of placing truth in a perspicuous form ; so as to instruct the hearer with greater advantage, and to leave the sceptic with less excuse. We should pray for the raising up of men like Apollos in the Christian church, if so it may please the Holy Ghost ; and consider our privilege to be very great, if the doctrines of the cross are thus proposed in our worshipping assemblies. Sanctified mental ability, quickness of perception and power in the scriptures, with warmth of affections and richly varied utterance, are blessings of a high and peculiar excellency : they are blessings in a relative sense, and they are usually accompanied with a certain degree of internal glowing perception of the nature of the gospel, which enriches the possessor individually, opening to him an access into those hidden wonders of the covenant which are treasured up in Christ, with attendant fervour and appropriation, which corresponds with the disposition and gift received. We may therefore lawfully ask for the blessing, but we must do so in great *humility*, and with industry in the use of whatever measure it may please the Lord to bestow.

The great object which, as teachers or private Christians, we should keep in view, is to be *mighty in the Scriptures*. This is the instrument by which

the Spirit's work is carried on in all its branches : whether it be to convince the Jew, or to convert the heathen, to rouse the professing Christian or to nourish the true believer ; to recover the wanderer or to confound the apostate ; *God's* word is that wonderful provision from which the Lord's witness derives *his* words of wisdom ; he must speak according to the divine oracles, and hereby encounter the perverseness or necessities of men. They must therefore be read, studied, retained, and prayed over ; and a soul thus employed will experience that they are serviceable to disperse his own ignorance of the way of the Lord, and lead him into gradual discoveries of the divine will.

But the particular case of Apollos directs us to further considerations. It shews us that there are measures of light, possessed even by the upright, which do not extend to the full benefit of all that revelation is designed to convey ; and that both believers and ministers may be found, who are honestly testifying of *all they know*, but are extremely defective both in their experience and statements. They know that repentance is necessary—they know that Jesus is the only Saviour—they understand that reformation of life must attend the true exercise of repentance and faith ; and in these truths they boldly and zealously preach and speak ; but it is evident that there is a confusion, a want of extensive information, and a spirit of bondage and legality, running through their discourses. This arises from a want of perception in the mysteries of the cross. The *whole* counsel of God has not been declared to them, or has not been understood. In these instances some benefit may be wrought upon hearers, so far as preparatory operations go ; but there cannot be liberty, joy in the Holy Ghost, or comprehensive sanctity, until the remaining clouds are dispersed, and Jesus Christ is seen in the full beams of the gospel,

breaking forth from the cross and grave in the Spirit's power. This further knowledge is frequently imparted through the aid of more advanced believers, who hearing the sentiments thus expressed, and perceiving the integrity of the speaker, are encouraged to make efforts, by communion and association, for the furtherance of the soul. The example of Aquila and Priscilla is very instructive on this point; they listened to the fervent witness with tender affection for the soul so evidently in earnest for God—and with prudence, charity, and faithfulness, they resolved to use their united labours for his good. In this disposition the advanced saint may still be a cherishing instrument for good to the weaker servants of Christ; and it is the duty of such to exercise discrimination, to extend kindness and forbearance in all instances where they perceive ignorance, although it may be in a minister, when that ignorance is manifestly the effect of remaining clouds upon a mind, from which natural *enmity* has been removed. When this is the state of the person to whom the help is requisite, *teachableness* and *humility* will be evidenced. Such an one is not high-minded and obstinate; he is not bent upon maintaining his own supposed superiority; vanity has no place in his zeal for God; and if he is ill-informed, or needs the furtherance of his views by greater measures of light, he will thankfully accept the kindness of the most private or insignificant of his hearers, who proffers to take him home to them, and to make him more perfectly acquainted with the way of the Lord. This is a characteristic mark of true converts, true ministers, true workers; they will gratefully receive whatever may render them more able witnesses for God; and knowing that they are nothing in themselves, and are liable to any degree of ignorance, or insufficiency, for so important a calling as the manifestation of Jesus

before the sons of men, they will ardently, and with a lowly mind, labour to be improved.

Let us put to ourselves these inquiries. Do I know the baptism of *John*, so as to see the need of repentance, and the virtue of the blood of the Lamb? Do I know more than this, and partake of the baptism of the *Holy Ghost*, so as to be led into the spiritual perception of the glorious covenant established in all its rich variety, in the person of this Lamb of God, as exalted to the right hand of God, and as the head the Lord and life of his ransomed people? Are these practically and experimentally learnt, and manifested in my life and conversation, whether it be private or public? And do I so draw my supplies from the unfathomable ocean, God in covenant, that my own soul is filled with the rich possession, which like refreshing showers drop from my speech, and fall on waiting thirsty souls who watch for the word? Is it thus that I give the blessing I have received: and am I with all humility delighting in association with saints, as a means of spiritual increase; with advancing purposes boldly to testify of Jesus, and live to his name? Inquiries such as these should be put to our own souls; and if we can thus discover our personal state before God we should act correspondently; either to the diligent endeavour after increase, or to the devoted use of our matured experience for the edification of the body.

PRAYER.

Most blessed and eternal God, look upon us, we humbly beseech Thee, with that peculiar favour which Thou hast bestowed upon others, and grant that we may approach Thee with those affections which are raised high by the Holy Ghost dwelling in us. With earnest desires we enter into Thy presence as our only God and refuge, desiring most of all to be bound to Thee in the ties of covenant love. We know that if such is our privilege all things else will be ours ; and that having our portion in Jesus the living head of his people, we shall be permitted to draw out of Him continual supplies according to our time of need. O do Thou, most gracious God, give us the consciousness of being thus interested in Thee, and pour into our souls the mighty salvation of the cross. Grant us the knowledge of the Scriptures, in such power and appropriation of their contents, as may enrich us for every good word and work ; and fill us with ardent zeal, that we may testify to others of all that we discover of redeeming love. If Thou hast distinguished us by the impartation of gifts which are suitable for the edification of souls, O sanctify them to this great end ; grant that we may have every ability consecrated and increased, and that our whole life may be one uninterrupted sacrifice of prayer, praise, and labour, offered up in the great propitiatory sacrifice Jesus Christ, the righteous Lord ! We ask of Thee to keep us in humility, and to further us in every spiritual attainment with all lowliness of mind and heart ; that we may never be puffed up with vanity, never be unwilling to hear that we are defective, never reluctant to receive instruction from such as in the respect of their relative calling may be less distinguished

than ourselves. O make us teachable like the little child, and grateful for every assistance that is afforded us in our progress through our pilgrimage. O that the blessings of the everlasting covenant may descend upon us, merciful God ! O that they may descend through us upon other souls who need Thy fostering care ; and that from us, as instruments in Thy hand, the testimony of Jesus may be given in the demonstration of the Holy Ghost. O Lord God eternal, hearken we pray Thee to our cry, and give unto our hearts the full supply of the unction of the Holy One, to consecrate and fit us for Thy service in body, soul, and mind, to the glory of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

CLAUDIUS LYSIAS.

Acts xxi. 31—40 ; xxii. 23—30 ; xxiii. 10—30.

THE character of Claudius Lysias demands our attention, on account of the providential goodness of the Lord extended to Paul through him, as the divine instrument. He is introduced to us in the midst of that scene of uproar which occurred in Jerusalem, on the occasion of Paul's compliance with the counsel of James, when, as we have seen in Paul's life, the whole multitude were bent upon murdering the Apostle. The report of this tumult being carried to the castle, Claudius Lysias, who was the chief captain, hastened to the scene, with soldiers and centurions, that he might instantly still the tumult. His presence prevailed for a short interval to quiet the storm. The Jews ceased their violent measures against Paul, and were constrained to own the civil power, so that he was surrendered into the hands of the captain, who, after binding him with two chains as a malefactor, demanded of his accusers what he had done. It was impossible to determine on what ground he was thus the object of their rage ; "some cried one thing, some another ;" and Lysias resolved upon committing him to the castle. Whilst the soldiers were bearing him away up the stairs, Paul entreated the captain to give him leave, ere he was consigned to imprisonment, to address the people ; who, after expressing his surprise that he could speak Greek, and interrogating him whether he were not a certain Egyptian who had aforetime fallen under the law, granted his request. Paul's speech to the Jews only produced more vehement expressions of rage against him ; and Lysias

determined to put him to the torture, that he might extort from him a confession of the crimes of which he concluded he must be guilty. Whilst the centurion was binding him for the purpose of inflicting the scourge, Paul asserted his privilege as a Roman citizen, intimating that Lysias and his soldiers were venturing upon an act full of peril to themselves, as he had neither been judged nor condemned by any legal process. Lysias, alarmed by this intelligence, adopted milder measures, and prepared for a regular investigation of the cause, placing Paul before his accusers, and examining the particulars of his case. This examination was, as we have before seen, conducted with great disorder and renewed attempts upon the life of Paul, who was rescued from the assembly of his contending adversaries by force, and carried, by order of Lysias, back to the castle. The conspiracy which the Jews entered into to lie in wait for Paul, and to murder him in his way from the castle to the council, being communicated to Lysias, he promptly took measures for his security; and perceiving that the Jews were not to be appeased upon the subject, he resolved upon sending the prisoner under a safe escort to Cesarea, seventy miles from Jerusalem, and committing him to Felix the governor there. Along with the prisoner he wrote an explanatory letter, shewing his reasons for adopting this step. We read no more of Lysias; but there are some interesting traits of character discoverable in this short history, which it may be profitable more particularly to observe.

It is evident that Lysias was devoid of religion: that which he called his religion was the abomination of heathen ignorance and superstition; but in this probably he was as loose and unconcerned as if he had no profession whatever. He seems to have been absorbed in his engagements and duties

as a soldier, with those pleasures of this world which usually accompany the taste and pursuits of men who are practically infidel, and troubled himself very little about concerns which respected a future scene. He must have been a man of this description, otherwise it is not possible that he should have been so wholly ignorant of the nature of Hebrew worship, its peculiarities, the particular expectations existing amongst that people, their wonderful doctrines given them by revelation, the pretensions and opinions of Paul as a witness to Jesus, or the questions by which the nation of Israel was at that time agitated;—of all these great and interesting topics he was wholly ignorant; and although residing in Jerusalem, was unacquainted with any of the important transactions, which were interesting to all persons who professed the least regard to the cause of religion. It appears that this ignorance was agreeable to him; for opportunities were afforded him, when Paul was his prisoner, for becoming better informed upon the point of dispute: but he had not even the natural curiosity belonging to some dispositions; he desired to know nothing beyond what might govern his decisions respecting the condemnation or acquittal of a man who was brought under his judgment. He had no conception that the matter of dispute had any thing to do with his own welfare, and declares in his letter to Felix, that he considered Paul to have done nothing worthy of death, though being evidently an object of hatred to the Jews on *some questions* which respected their laws, but towards which he makes no other reference, speaking of them as matters unintelligible and very unimportant to the rest of men.

Notwithstanding this continued indifference to the subject of religion, Lysias seems to have imbibed a favourable opinion of the Apostle. He

clearly perceived that he was an innocent man, having committed no offence that called for the interference of the civil power. He likewise commiserated his circumstances, as one unjustly persecuted, and exposed to the treachery of base and murderous men. His conduct towards him when first he loaded him with the chains, and when he commanded an examination by torture, was the effect of an education barbarous, and of customs that are diabolical, and expressed towards Paul under *prejudice* and a supposition that he were a character notorious for crime: but when this opinion was corrected, his conduct was changed: so that upon the whole he was humane and considerate, and frequently rescued him from violence, with an evident interest in the preservation of his life. This is remarkably shewn in his arrangement for conveying him to Cæsarea; wherein he evidently consulted for making his journey as safe and as easy as possible. In his reception of Paul's messenger he manifested courtesy and equity: he was willing to admit him into his presence, and kindly to enter into his relative affection. And, in his letter to Felix, he honestly stated his good opinion of the prisoner.

These are what we call *amiable* traits of feeling, and dispositions which are frequently far from the breast of man. Yet we may discover, combined with this spirit, somewhat of selfishness. It is evident that he *feared* the consequences of what he had hastily done in binding a Roman citizen, for which he might have been called to account and punished. He probably therefore wished to conciliate Paul, and by kindness and attention to make amends for what his imprudence had led him to commit. Certainly his letter to Felix intimates this feeling; he *misrepresented* the transaction which had first made Paul his prisoner,

wishing to make it appear to the Roman government that he had screened him *on account* of his being *a Roman* : by this subterfuge no doubt he hoped to escape the suspicion of having infringed the prerogative of Roman citizens, and that he should also merit the commendation of the higher powers under whom he served. Thus his *own* interest was a moving spring in his conduct ; so that his kindnesses, however acceptable to Paul, and instrumental in God's hand for good, were not of a purely disinterested or genuine character.

We see by records of this description, how possible it is to be surrounded by light and yet to live in darkness. It is not the possession of the privileges of religion that will in any instance impart the blessed experience of the Lord's kingdom in the heart. And if we are in the habit of observing what are the ways and dispositions which prevail in the world, we shall cease to have any surprise at the apparently extraordinary ignorance and apathy of Lysias. Christ's kingdom goes on with all its interesting and important accompaniments without obtaining any attention from men of the world, men of business, men of pleasure. These have their minds and affections absorbed in their own particular interests, and are wholly unacquainted with many things in the Christian history, which have been the subject of great discussion, which have been dispensations of trial to the saints, or have awakened songs of triumph amongst angels. *Spiritual* religion especially is a subject hidden, and as if it belonged not to any region in the known world ; and believers are moving on in their glorious calling, diligently discharging their several obligations, and leaving one memorial after another of the grace and victory of the cross, without any tidings

of these events forcing their way to the worldling's ear, or constraining one feeling of interest beyond the carnal round of earthly pursuits. In the midst of this ignorance, however, there will sometimes arise occasions which obtain for the question of religion some nearer access to the worldling. Uproars are in every age stirred up from time to time against Christians, and loud accusations are poured forth upon them. Some disputed doctrine, some discontent, some slander, or various other causes, will give rise to loud altercations, wherein nothing can be heard with certainty; reports are spread, according to the opinion, prejudice, or party who utter them, and "some cry one thing some another." These occurrences will frequently be made the subject of table talk in parties of the world; or may in some instances be attended with appeals made to the secular power, the magistrate, or civil officer; and usually after canvassing the matter in all the ignorance and prejudice of nature, men shut it up by coming to the conclusion that these Christians belong to the old disturbers of public order and tranquillity, or that their unmeaning disputes are merely about non-essential questions, and that in fact their peculiar tenets are deserving only of contempt. Is not this the case in cities, towns, and neighbourhoods, under our own observation? Are there not places known to ourselves wherein Jesus has a little flock, where Christian interests are zealously preached, and where conversions and triumphs of the Spirit are continually carried on by the Lord, even as in days of old, whilst the very inhabitants of the same town or village are contemptuously, or from indifference, entirely ignorant of the whole work? If they are ever forced to consider it, seeing it through the thick mists of prejudice, and keeping aloof from the whole concern excepting so far as the duty of office or station obliges an interference,

there will sometimes be a degree of candour forced from such persons comparable to that of Lysias: a closer investigation of the cause will shew that the Christian is suffering by calumny, and that there are really estimable qualities in those persons whom they have been used to despise. This will produce a more generous feeling towards the *individual*, not because his *principles* as a *disciple* are better understood or appreciated, but because it becomes a matter of conscience and honour to espouse the cause of one who is evidently misrepresented and treated treacherously.

All this is a confirmation to that affecting revelation which declares the blindness and perverseness of sinners' hearts; and if we truly enter into the awfulness of such a state of nature, we shall feel the involuntary sigh which pays its tribute of confession to the ruin that overspreads the human race. But it should teach us how careful we ought to be to *investigate* those questions, which appear, to so vast a proportion of our fellow-creatures, of such great importance; and that we should give ourselves to inquire into those peculiarities which bring upon spiritual persons so constant an expression of the uproar of resentment, calumny, and reproach. So likewise ought we to guard against prejudice in these inquiries; lest by the darkness of our own understandings and hearts we fail of obtaining the satisfactory solution of our difficulties. If we occupy stations of relative importance where our influence is extensive, or if we are in office and have to give righteous sentence in matters of this description, it becomes still more necessary that we watch against prejudice, and resist the temptations which arise out of our own nature, wherein let us remember, there is a determined *enmity* to the cross. In all circumstances which call for the exercise of the

civil law, they who fill the seat of judgment should bear in mind that they are sworn to judge righteously, and are answerable to their own eternal Judge for every sentence which they pronounce. And in order uprightly to discharge such responsibilities, it will manifestly appear to every reflective mind that there ought to be candour, justice, courage—a determination impartially to repress vice, and a heart that can sympathise with and resolve to succour the oppressed.

We should be very careful wherein like Lysias we may have to represent our own conduct, whether it be to superiors or to any of our friends and associates in life. It is remarkable how universally men fall into the snare of plausibly pleading their own cause, even in cases where the conscience and the fact testify that they have erred. Self-love, pride, and creature interests, will move us all to such insincerity; and in concerns both of importance and of comparative indifference we may constantly detect this corrupt propensity. We are disposed to conceal what is faulty—to exaggerate what we deem praiseworthy—to criminate others, and to represent our own conduct in such colours as shall hide us from censure, and obtain a tribute of estimation from man. Oh! how false, how flattering, is our deceitful heart! Let it be explored—let its base inclination to turn to every refuge of lies be detected and abhorred! And let us learn from what we have here contemplated in Lysias, to humble ourselves, as capable of the same ignorance and self-deception; seeking the blessed Spirit to hallow and sanctify us, and to make us the helpers of saints; not merely in a discharge of the claims of justice and humanity, but with an individual interest in their inheritance and peculiar privileges.

PRAYER.

Most gracious and blessed Lord, Thou art the refuge and strength of our souls, and our exceeding joy and endless crown; and we come to Thee with love and gratitude for all those mercies which Thou hast bestowed. Blessed be Thy name we know Thee, otherwise we should not now be present before Thee, to bring our supplications near; we would for ever extol Thy dear name for Thy wonderful compassions, and for giving us liberty thus to enter before the mercy seat. We are utterly unworthy this privilege, we can give no reason for our possessing it but that Thou hast chosen in Thy sovereignty to bless us with the grace of supplication, we have neither inclination or power to speak to Thee, but only as we are wrought upon by the ever blessed Holy Ghost. O teach us to understand this with grateful affections; help us, Lord, to use our distinction with diligence and zeal. We beseech Thee in behalf of that dark and ignorant world by which we are surrounded, that it may please Thee to carry the light of Thy blessed gospel into every distant region, making the desert places of the earth to rejoice in Thy salvation. And we would include in these prayers, O Lord, those who are ignorant in our own realm—those who whilst having the light in the midst of their neighbourhood, or in the bosom of their family, are still unaffected by the vision of the Lord's glory. O show them the truth as it is in Jesus; show them that something more is necessary than the name of a christian; and if they have never yet examined the question concerning Thy law, awaken them now to look into the revelation, and savingly to appreciate that blessed law of liberty which is proclaimed in the

gospel of peace. O let the Holy Ghost remove the veil from every mind and heart, and the pure delights which flow from fellowship in the Spirit be known by the sons of men. Help us in all situations to evince our blessed privileges, and to constrain by our consistency the testimony of the world, that we have not done the things which malice would lay to our charge, but that as Thy disciples we have followed Thee without guile. O do Thou thus glorify Thyself in us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FELIX.

Acts xxiii. 23—35 ; xxiv. 1—27.

WE are indebted to the page of profane history for many of those particulars which belong to the character of Felix. The Scriptures keep simply to those points wherein he stood in connection with the Apostle Paul ; but we may be permitted to unite with their testimony the evidence to be gathered from such records, as afford a more comprehensive detail of his general habits and circumstances. The character of Felix was stained by the perpetration of the most scandalous sins. His office was that of governor over many parts of the Roman empire ; and his situation gave him also an especial power over Judea. But this possession of authority was constantly abused, and deeds of oppression and injustice, and especially of extortion, were so perpetually committed by him during the seven years in which he was in power, that his name became infamous. This however little affected him, for he was destitute of shame or remorse. Towards the Jews he demonstrated great barbarity : and upon one occasion, being reproved by Jonathan a high priest, he immediately caused him to be put to death. In his more private pursuits he was equally wicked. Drusilla, called his wife, was by birth a Jewess ; she had married the king of the Emessinians, but Felix persuaded her to leave her husband, and cohabit with him. From such a man, little of advantage could reasonably be hoped by St. Paul, when he was passed from the custody of Lysias into his hands ; but his conduct towards the Apostle was more temperate than might have been expected. Having read the epistle from

Lysias, he ordered Paul to be committed to *Herod's* judgment hall ; a place where prisoners of less criminality than others were kept, with some degree of comfort and privilege denied to the more notorious ; and a few days afterwards, his accusers coming down to Cesarea, Felix sat in the seat of judgment, and having heard the accusation, beckoned to Paul to answer for himself. The Apostle gladly embraced this liberty, declaring, that he had the more satisfaction in doing so, because that Felix from his circumstances had possessed better opportunity than Lysias for knowing the principles of the Jews, and understanding the question upon which he was now charged with sin. He then proceeded with a short, plain, and simple relation of the facts. Felix was fully convinced of the innocence of his prisoner, but he durst not immediately acquit him before the Jews ; he, therefore, under pretence of waiting the arrival of Lysias, postponed giving sentence ; but ordered that Paul should be treated with the utmost lenity, and not be debarred the comfort of having free intercourse with any of his friends. His mind seems to have been under some degree of excitement from what he had heard ; for after a temporary absence from Cesarea, he returned bringing Drusilla with him ; and having an anxiety to know something more of Christianity, he sent for Paul, and heard him upon the subject. The Apostle's discourse was, however, too personal and powerful for Felix to endure ; and in the midst of an irresistible alarm which seized upon his breast, he dismissed him for the present. In a little time he succeeded in silencing these fears, and frequently afterwards sent for Paul to hold conversation with him ; he also indulged a hope that his own avaricious desires might be gratified by the generosity of the Christians, supposing that they would seek to *purchase* the Apostle's liberty.

In this he was disappointed ; and after two years, being himself removed from office, he left Paul in bonds. This he did in order to conciliate the Jews, of whom he was afraid ; but he did not effect his design, for they followed him to Rome, and there accused him of wicked extortions, &c. ; and being found guilty, he escaped condemnation only through the influence of his brother Pallas, who was in high estimation with the government. Thus the public career of Felix was concluded in the midst of ignominy ; and so we have reason to believe concluded his miserable and hopeless life.

The opportunities which Felix possessed for knowing the true faith exceeded those of Lysias, because by his office as *governor* he was of *necessity* brought into the examination of customs, laws, and opinions. He had also great advantages by his station for obtaining an insight into the lives and characters of Christians, and the ground of dispute between them and the Jews. Cesarea was a place where the Lord had some eminent followers. It was the place where Philip resided—where Cornelius was raised up as a monument of Gentile liberty—and where Felix had constantly before him a flourishing and holy church. He ought therefore to have had an extensive acquaintance with truth ; and it is expressly said of him, that he *had* “ more perfect knowledge of that way.” Notwithstanding these advantages, he was by religious profession an idolater. This was to him a more easy service ; it cost him no trouble in the mortification of sin, and proposed no disturbance to his pursuit of this world. It is probable also that the depraved state of Drusilla, a professed Jewess, would serve to settle him into increased atheistic indifference to the subjects of religion, since he saw so little power of religion in her, and found her as much a slave to the flesh

as he could be himself. His actions *demonstrate* that he was unfeeling, daring, and selfish in his dispositions ; he had no scruple in gratifying his own lusts at whatever expense it might be ; the property, domestic happiness, lives and characters of men were all trampled under his feet when he had a lust to satisfy : being destitute of compunction or conscientiousness, he pursued his course without any regard to consequences ; and although he was rendered infamous by many deeds, which considered merely in a natural point of view were heinous, he cared not for such dishonour, but could without a blush oppress the innocent, rob the helpless, and pervert judgment. That Felix had some conviction under the word of the Gospel is evident ; hardened as he was, this powerful testimony found its way into his conscience. That this conviction extended also to some length is evident ; for by it he was induced contrary to his universal habits, to treat the injured prisoner with courtesy, kindness, administering to his comforts, and affording to him that particular comfort which he knew would be the most acceptable to a saint, free access to Christians who sought his company, and to whom he might minister of eternal things. All this was very singular in such a man as Felix, and proves how deeply he had felt the impression of Paul's vindication of himself and of the gospel. That his mind was irresistibly interested is as evident, otherwise he would not so frequently have sent for Paul. It is true mere curiosity might move him to the last-mentioned act, yet even if this were the only motive, it is a proof that the subject occasioned him some thought and solicitude. Beyond this, however, conviction was horrible to him ; he knew that his conduct was altogether opposed both to righteousness and temperance ; therefore judgment to come was no subject for him to receive ; he had lived without believing

or fearing it—he had indulged in crime without any apprehension of being required to give an account of his ways—and the presentation of such a thought was abhorrent and frightful to his soul ; it threw him into irresistible terrors and sickening dread. Such emotion must have been truly surprising to his mind and heart, hitherto so wholly insensible, and unaccustomed to admit an arbitrator in his breast beyond the authority of his own depraved will. It is affecting to see how much Felix was reduced during the moments of this internal convulsion below the arrogant independence he usually boasted ; how he was made to tremble before the prisoner, betraying his inward discomposure, and manifesting to those who surrounded him that before the judgments of the Almighty he felt himself impotent and vain ! But convulsions, such as Felix felt, were not the abiding operations which accompany the downfall of Satan's dominion ; he trembled and feared, but he was not shaken from his allegiance with sin and hell ; and although he was unable to recover himself so far as immediately to proceed in his conversation with the Apostle, he withdrew to consult with the inward traitors of his soul, and to strive after the restoration of his former sinful tranquility. He awfully succeeded in this attempt, and affords an important example of the wretched efforts of resisting conscience, since it is manifest he became after this increasingly hardened, and having overcome the first shock, could henceforth listen to the most enlarged statements and personal addresses without an emotion. Yet Felix was a miserable man ; when he dismissed his convictions, he dismissed also the dawnings of a light which was able to bring him forth into the brightness of the gospel day. It was the testimony of the Holy Ghost to the gospel of Jesus which he excluded from his mind, resisting him who convinces

of sin, and barring out the blessing of the conviction of righteousness and peace in Jesus. He obtained no portion from the world which made any amends to him for this loss ; he remained in slavery to lusts and pursuits, which finally reduced him to disgrace, and bereft him of his idol—this world ; and when he made a sacrifice of his conscience respecting Paul, leaving him in bonds although he knew his innocence, he met not the reward of his iniquitous hope to conciliate his foes, his character was exposed, his infamy proclaimed, and his honours blasted ! Thus he was finally a prey to vexation and disappointment from men, and finished his mortal days ripening for that more terrible judgment, which Jehovah inflicts upon the impenitent transgressor.

What a dreadful accumulation of evil belongs to a sinner's heart ! how frightful is the survey we take from time to time of that inward region of depravity, where Satan has made his residence, exercising there a domineering dominion, cruel, destructive and ignominious. The strength of our besetting sin especially is terrible ; whatever it may be in each individual, it will form chains and bonds, by which the wretched captive is dragged into every excess, or driven onwards by Satan as a miserable drudge under this oppressive yoke. Lust, love of money, ambition for worldly greatness, are master passions, and have their thousand vassals, who, like Felix, own their rule with servile submission. Alas ! this native misery is many times confirmed and increased, as in him, by ungodly connexions, and no connexion is so powerful an auxiliary to the sins that are in us, as one which throws us into association with a hardened insensible *professor*, or one who has had greater external privileges than the soul with whom it has formed an alliance.

By this means, it will frequently occur, that an offender becomes settled in transgression, by adding to his depravity confirmed atheism, as to religious truths, considering them all as a mere human or political scheme. O let us feel this example of Felix as a powerful appeal to ourselves, and see what cause we have to be humbled as sinners, and how necessary it is for our best interests that we carefully shun the dangerous rock of unhallowed alliance, or connexions in life by which so many have suffered a fatal wreck.

There is a power in the gospel which will in repeated instances effect which it did in Felix. It is able to burst through the thickest barriers, and can enter with triumph even into the very heart of the enemies' dominions, and there unfurl the banner of the cross : but there are convictions from the Spirit that are *short of this* operation, producing only the tremblings of a Felix, and followed by the same manifestations of insincerity and sin. We know that there are innumerable persons, living in the habits of *unrighteousness* and intemperance, and careless of any future world or judgment. These may in some instances be moved by conscience to approve *christians* as excellent persons, who are unjustly cast out by men. It will induce them to do many acts of kindness and good will towards them individually. It may go further than this, and lead to some inquiries as to their particular views and expectations, and may by this means place the soul under the occasional ministration of the Word : but it has no native power to win upon the affections, and to divest one lust of its claims and captivating power ; so that, however far these excitements may extend, they are overcome by the strength of sin, and the heart is no more reconciled to the cross than it was previously to any of these emotions. We have evidences of this

state constantly presented in congregations, or in private intercourse, where a man will bear *general* statements, and feel very cordial with the speaker, but where instantly upon a *personal* address being made, or a power of the Holy Ghost felt as if drawing to closer quarters with the soul, the whole bosom is roused into tumult, and the whole truth is repelled. Nature shrinks from the idea of future judgment. There is something in the thought of having every sin exposed and all hidden imaginations laid open, and every aggravating circumstance of transgression brought to light, that is truly terrific even to the most desperately resisting spirit ; and this strong emotion usually prompts such persons to get rid of the subject that occasioned it as soon as possible. If at this moment we are disposed to deal uprightly with our own souls, and will scrutinize the various feelings and dispositions we have evinced in times of this description, we shall undoubtedly possess decisive proofs in our own breast of the workings of this evil. We know that we have endeavoured to silence conscience. It may perhaps be true, that to the extent of Felix's sin we may not have proceeded, yet we cannot deny the many instances wherein we have fled from its voice, or if unable to escape, have met it with false and plausible reasonings, which have been intended as bribes to keep it from giving us pain. How often do sinners resist it in desperation, being determined upon the continuance of sin. How often act deceitfully, and pretend to give it a hearing, but with procrastinations of its dictates, until a more convenient season shall come. How constantly do we urge our youth, or business, or connexions, as so many reasons why at this time we may send away the minister, at the same time that we dismiss him with fair promises, that when older, or less engaged, or more independent, his admoni-

tions shall be called for and received. That this has been more or less a trespass committed by ourselves, we cannot but confess. And we should observe the falschood that is attendant upon all these flattering words. Do we not constantly see that such men live and die exactly in the same spirit of procrastination,—that they constantly exhibit a state wherein no impression remains, becoming more hardened and indifferent than ever, and that this insincerity is manifestly *punished* in many instances by the death of conscience so long as this life remains, or by some sudden visitation from God by which the present life is unexpectedly cut off? Our own observation and experience should combine to rouse us to the cultivation of *sincerity* before God, and to put us upon proving it by *immediate* acceptance of his warning voice. If we have ever felt the tremblings which seized on Felix, or if the thought of future judgment is now sickening, distasteful, alarming; surely it is acting an irrational part to resist such a token of our unmeetness for meeting that day. And our wisest path would be to pursue the inquiry which might shew us the way of salvation, and bring us to peace in a justifying head. It is only in and by our dear Lord that we can anticipate this approaching revelation of the day of God with any assurance of rest; but, for ever blessed be his name, in him we may look to death, the grave, eternity, and the resurrection, without alarm; for we are more than conquerors through him that hath loved us. Let us seek our shelter there, and confide in Jesus for our triumph, over every thing opposed to our inheritance in him.

PRAYER.

WE humbly implore Thee, O Almighty God, to consider us as Thy dear children, in whom Thou wilt bring honour to Thy holy name, making us the living and lively witnesses of Thy truth in every age: behold us, O our God, in Jesus the beloved, and grant us an abiding interest in Thy favour, as treasured up in Him. We have just reason, O Lord, to confess our exposure to Thy dreadful judgment, for we have done evil: unrighteousness and intemperance have attended our paths, and we have lived as if there were no judgment to come. We confess this with sorrow of heart; we lament that our course has been so long attended with such marks of depravity and estrangement from Thee; but we are unable to remedy the evil, O God, we are still in the midst of temptations, and have a load of sin and misery, and must dread the thought of death and eternity, unless we are befriended by Thee the only deliverer. We therefore come into Thy presence, that we may lay open all our misery, and cast ourselves upon Thy Almighty mercy. O wash away the sins we have committed, and let them not rise up in judgment against us. Deliver us from condemnation, and hide us in Thy breast of forgiving love. So give us, we beseech Thee, the consolation of the cross, pouring into our hearts the precious balm of Gilead, and giving us the peace that Thy voice alone can give. Vouchsafe, O Lord, to look into each of our hearts now in Thy presence; and if Thou perceivest in us any insincerity and connivance with sin, or reluctance to the immediate acceptance of Thy will: we pray Thee to undertake the cure of the foul disease, and to apply the grace of the covenant to heal our souls. O do not suffer within us the

prevalence of any sinful passion : release us, we beseech Thee, from every wayward imagination, and from all the deceitful reasonings of nature ; and let our convictions operate savingly, and bring us to the shelter Thou hast opened in a crucified Lord. Let the example of Felix be received with profit by us all ; let it be instrumental to warn us of trifling with the convictions of our mind : and O use it, Lord, to the furtherance of our gratitude for every saving operation of the Holy Ghost which we have received. Thus hear and continually bless us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

FESTUS.

Acts xxv. 1—27 ; xxvi. 24—32.

THE successor to Felix was Festus, who continued only two years in the government of Judea, dying at the expiration of that period. He was placed in this station just at the time when Paul was a prisoner, and is in consequence one of the characters introduced to us in the sacred history. One of his first acts after his appointment was a visit to Jerusalem ; he probably intended there to investigate the affairs he was about to govern, and to present himself to the Jewish people. This occasion was instantly seized by Paul's enemies for preferring their suit against him, and with entreaties that Festus would give commandment to have him brought to Jerusalem, that he might there be tried. This was done with a design to murder him by the way. Their request was at once refused, not from any favour which Festus had to Paul, of whom he was entirely ignorant, but under the divine influence upon his mind, God caring for his dependent servant ; and in the judgment of Festus, probably, because he considered it unmeet to make this concession, and inconsistent with his own authority ; he did not decline the trial, but he appointed the accusers to go down to Cesarea, where he would hear their question. After ten days he himself returned ; and the day following, Paul was brought forth for examination. The Jews being unable to substantiate any of the charges which they urged against him, Festus, like his predecessor, was fully convinced of his innocence ; it was however manifest to him that

the Jews ardently desired his death, and that there would be great popularity in either confining him for life, or giving him up into their power; ~~the~~ latter appeared to him the most desirable, and ~~he~~ accordingly proposed to Paul to go up to Jerusalem, and there to be judged. This proposal was rejected by the Apostle with just indignation, and with an immediate appeal, from the evident injustice intended him, to the tribunal of Cæsar. This appeal necessarily produced an arrest of proceedings, and Festus with some expression of offence yielded the point. Paul was therefore remanded to prison, until an opportunity should occur for sending him to Rome. In the mean time Festus was visited by Agrippa and Bernice, and the prisoner's case was stated to them by the Governor, with a plausible expression of his own designs towards him; and Agrippa having a desire to hear Paul for himself, preparations were instantly made for his gratification; and on the morrow, Paul was brought forth before a splendid assembly, Festus introducing him to the company with a short explanation of his circumstances. When the Apostle received intimation that he was at liberty to speak, he opened his mouth, and in a simple and fervent strain stated his own conversion, and some of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. The most silent and respectful attention seems to have been given, until Festus, wrought up to the highest pitch of wonder mixed with contempt and incredulity, interrupted Paul by a loud exclamation, accusing him of madness; to which the Apostle replied in firmness, zeal, and charity. However Festus might in some respects blame, and in others pity the prisoner, as deranged in intellect, it is evident that he was under great restraint; and that finally he agreed with Agrippa, that he had done nothing worthy of death or of bonds; and might have been set at liberty if he

had not appealed to Cesar; it was now however necessary to send him to Rome. And the assembly, after this hearing, separated each to their several interest, and Paul was returned to prison. We know nothing further of Festus; his career after this scene was very short; and he is not again mentioned in the Scriptures.

There is very little variety afforded us in this character; we have only a renewed view of those worldly principles, by which men of this description are governed. That he was what is meant by the phrase, *a man of the world*, is quite evident; and as such he seems to have conducted himself with attention to the customs of his station, and the requirements belonging to his associations in life. He was polite, hospitable, and intent upon making his visitors happy under his roof, giving himself to promote their wishes, and paying them every respect in his power. He was also like thousands of the human race in every age, fond of high station, jealous of its prerogatives, and given to pomp and show. Popularity also was a darling object with him, to which like others he was willing to sacrifice his conscience, treading in the steps of Felix, continuing to oppress an innocent man for the purpose of pleasing those who might be advantageous to himself, and instead of being abashed by Paul's appeal to Cæsar, which was a testimony to him that his injustice was seen, indulging a feeling of proud offence as if he had been the person injured. As to religious knowledge he had none, and probably troubled not himself upon the subject; his ideas of crime or of innocence turning wholly upon secular interests, whilst the revelation of God was esteemed to be a *superstition*, applicable and interesting to only one class of people, whose laws and customs were all peculiar, and affected not the rest of men.

Jesus was entirely unknown to him ; he speaks of him with awful disrespect, evidently concluding him to be nothing more than a *dead man*, and that the idea of his being alive was one of the delusions belonging to a superstitious sect. All this he confesses by his own words to Agrippa, but at the same time acknowledges that he felt himself an inadequate judge in these matters. In this acknowledgement there was no humility ; he did not consider his ignorance any disgrace, on the contrary he appears to have had a pride in maintaining his credit as a *reasonable* man ; and he looked upon the Apostle as the man *devoid* of this faculty. Instead of attending to the interesting detail of the divine visitation to the soul of Paul, he was impatient of the interest expressed by others, and of the fervent boldness with which the prisoner spoke ; and yielding to the impetuous impulse of his indignant feeling, he committed a breach upon his usual politeness, and betrayed his own violence and pride.

These are not *peculiarities* of character ; we have had many examples of the same description : and of Festus we can only say, that he exhibits the state of a soul lost in carnal policy, interested only by human pursuits, with a mind shut up in spiritual darkness, and affections entirely estranged from God. In thus summing up the evidence of his condition we possess an affecting confirmation of the innumerable passages of Scripture, which describe the ruin of sinners, and which so expressly affirm that the friendship of the world is enmity against God ; and that whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God ; and we should be persuaded, that however men may escape the charge of those more abominable offences which disgrace human nature, there is no safety for the soul so long as the appellation, *a man of the world*,

is due. The whole style of such a man's education, principles, habits and associations, is different from the simplicity of the gospel. The pompous display of greatness, the trifling method of intercourse, the indulgence of mere carnal unprofitable discussions, suit not the humble, pure, and edifying spirit inculcated by the Scriptures; and if a man will aim at spiritual attainments, he must purge himself from these. If we have the opportunity of observing, or can call to mind past observations upon the mode of converse, &c. which is adopted in the world, and thus contrast it with the communion which is maintained in the society of saints, we shall instantly be struck with the decided difference that exists between those assemblies. In one, all things relating to the interests of time absorbing the conversation and interest of the company; in the other, the glorious possessions of eternity being the dear and soul-animating theme. It is acknowledged that in the most polite circles of worldly associations, the subjects of religion are sometimes admitted, more especially in a day when by the zeal of the church, or by any unusual occurrence, the attention of men is roused, and the subjects of discussion are considered sufficiently important as a national interest, to awaken some inquiry. And in more private matters of controversy, or in canvassing any particular character in the professing church, or when any thing like unusual zeal is displayed by believers, or when any who have professed a serious discipleship backslide and commit inconsistencies, these are all occasions for the *entertainment* of the world; and frequently men of this spirit will introduce such subjects, as Festus did to Agrippa, without any estimation of the religious doctrines that are concerned, and only as one of the sources whence present topics of conversation may be supplied. Such proceedings, so far from hallowing the

worldly scene, defile it the more, by the commission of the sin of irreverence, and frequently by the spirit and expression of infidelity.

If we inquire into the origin of all that indifference and irreverence which men betray upon the subject of religion, we find it in the *ignorance* of the natural mind, linking itself with the enmity of the natural heart. It does not comprehend *spiritual* truth, for it has no discernment into the nature of any thing revealed in the scriptures. We know this by looking into our own state previously to the entrance of divine light, for we well remember that we had not the smallest conception of the divine character, or of any of those divine works, decrees, and acts of government which result from that nature. Out of this native state there will arise a blind judgment, which contemplates the principles and practices of Christians, when they are seriously impressed, as things unintelligible, and which proceeds to pass sentence upon them as vain *superstitions*. The conversion of a soul, an internal revelation of God ; and a state of simple dependence upon the Holy Ghost, are considered enthusiasm, visionary, foolishness ; and this opinion being seconded by the sinner's love of earth and self, all real faith becomes a subject of scepticism or scorn, and the servants of the most high God are reproached as madmen, and under the power of delusion. When this judgment is confirmed and settled, leading to the resistance of opportunity for better knowledge, the soul is in a fearful state of increasing condemnation, and we should so meditate upon these scriptural examples which are recorded for our learning, as to feel the importance of having our natural darkness dissipated, and our horrible enmity to the light taken away. We possibly are proud of the possession of *reason*, and are studious to secure, that in the concerns of this life it shall be unimpeached ; yet how wholly

unreasonable is our conduct in the sight of God, if we are living without any apprehension of the concerns of a future and eternal life! If like Festus we *doubt* of such manner of questions, is it not unreasonable to *reject* them as if there were no uncertainty in our mind? Do they not at least demand an investigation? and are we not acting the part of folly to refuse this scrutiny, only because there appears some difficulty in the subject? and since there are results, dependent upon the acceptance or rejection of these truths, wherein *eternity* is involved, and which will issue in our own individual blessedness or irremediable woe, is it not *unreasonable* to venture such important interests without one sigh of solicitude, or wish to be informed? Assuredly we shall admit, that if we or any man are found following on in this course of darkness, unmoved, prejudiced and carnally secure, we are fatally forfeiting our claim to true *reason*, and are proving that however rational we may be in what respects a dying existence here, we are irrational in the things which are the most abiding and true. There are also amongst many who *profess* to be animated by the Christian hope, unreasonable proceedings for which they are justly chargeable with egregious folly. Some Christians make their boast of the gospel without participating in one of its privileges, they are satisfied with a *name* to live: they are not in the liberty of the Holy Ghost, they do not possess the sanctity of a soul liberated from sin, or the sweetness of free communion with the Lord, or the joy of his pardoning justifying grace, but pass from Sabbath to Sabbath, from form to form, as if all Christianity consisted of ceremonies and an external rule. There are others who travel on their way with some deeper impression, having hearts affected by the weight of their burden, and spirits conflicting with many distresses and griefs;

but they live as if indeed *Jesus were dead*; and although professedly they affirm him to be alive, they practically derive no joyous benefit from the fact. All this is *unreasonable*. If we do indeed acknowledge the obligations laid upon us by the gospel, or if we truly believe in him who is risen from the dead, it is only reasonable to stir up the soul to *vital* affections, and to live in the *sense* of that exaltation which is possessed by the believer in the glorified Head. If then we are amongst those who boast of greater discernment than Festus; if we are with the followers of Jesus who *lay* hold upon him in his relative offices: we are bound to maintain a *consistency* in our practice with our principles, and to exhibit to others the experimental effect produced by appropriating a risen and ascended Saviour. We then shall feel and manifest that the gospel has proposed to us the word of soberness and truth, and that whilst it elevates the whole soul beyond the confines of this transitory world, it invests it with solidity of experience and with a substantial inheritance.

P R A Y E R.

ALMIGHTY and most gracious God, accept from us; who enter into Thy presence, the humble offering which rises unto Thee with unfeigned love: and let us have a near access to Thy bosom, that we may breathe out our interests there, and tell Thee all we wish or want. Blessed be Thy name for affording us the liberty of such confidential approaches unto Thee, and for drawing us by the eternal Spirit into the affections of prayer, communion, and praise: privileges found in Thee. O mercifully impart the increase of all those pure and sacred exercises, which result from the fellowship that is thus high and spiritual; and enable us

to manifest with holy decision, with what sobriety united with fervour we can prosecute our walk of faith. Deliver us, blessed Lord, from all those entanglements which belong to the present world, that we may resolutely break from the enslaving chain of human customs, principles, and ways, knowing, O Lord, that Thy people are not of this world, even as Thou wert not of this world, and that all who are in friendship with Thee are loosed from the yoke and bondage of a fallen world. Have mercy upon those who are ignorant and depraved, and to whom Thy revelation is a sealed book: O give to them, blessed God, the power of spiritual discernment, the life of the Spirit shed into their dark and depraved minds; and vouchsafe that in this divine power they may come forth and live to Thee. Shew to unreasonable men the excellence of those doctrines against which they are disposed to blaspheme; make them to understand the glorious promises that are sealed in Jesus the surety of the sinner's soul; and O reveal the kingdom established in a risen Jesus, and let the everlasting riches of the saints in Him be unfolded to their wondering eyes. We long to see Thee glorified in all the earth; we long to behold Thee reigning over Thy rightful heritage; O Saviour, cast down the empire of Satan,—let darkness flee before Thee, and the world be filled with Thy glory! And upon us who now proffer these requests, O let the anointing descend; baptize us with the Holy Ghost, fill us with heavenly wisdom and favour, and in life and death uphold and sanctify, and accept us in Jesus Christ our ever blessed Lord. Amen.

AGRIPPA.

Acts xxv. 13—27; xxvi. 1—3, 24—32.

IN the interesting history of Paul's examination we are introduced to Agrippa. He was the son of Herod Agrippa, of whom we have already taken a view, as see Acts xii. 1. On the death of his father he lived in comparative privacy, being advanced into favour at court very gradually. In process of time, however, that favour was very great, and he was placed over many provinces, receiving as an act of courtesy the title of king. He discharged his government with equity and mildness of character; and was universally estimated as a man of amiable and benevolent dispositions. His religious profession was that of Israel; for though not an Israelite by birth, he was descended from proselyted ancestors, and in consequence was educated in the Jewish faith. Notwithstanding the good report which was obtained by Agrippa, on the ground of his public administration, and a remarkably strict attention to certain parts of external morality, he lived under the suspicion of an awful crime, being supposed to be on criminal terms with his sister Berenice, who is presented to us in the Acts as accompanying him in his congratulatory visit to Festus. We have already considered the circumstances of this visit, so different probably from any thing which Agrippa had anticipated; and how, in consequence of his own request, he had the opportunity of hearing the apostle Paul make his defence; an occurrence which gave much satisfaction to Paul, who addressed the king as one who was fully competent to be a judge in this affair. The influence

of the apostle's address justified what he had affirmed; for Agrippa was persuaded from his knowledge of the prophets, and from the soundness of the reasoning proposed to him, that Christianity had some awful and irresistible witnesses to its truth; and under a strong excitement of his judgment he confessed his conviction, saying, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." This degree of concession did not content the apostle, who urged upon him the necessity for a more decided acceptance of the cross. The hopeful appearance of conviction passed no further; Agrippa had no desire to hear of an *altogether* discipleship, and immediately dissolved the meeting by rising from his seat. He did however so far fulfil the claims of justice in respect of the prisoner, as to profess his persuasion of the injustice with which he had been treated, and that he had a full right to demand his liberty as an innocent man. The condition of the Jews becoming intolerable to them on account of the grievous oppressions which they suffered from the many masters who ruled over them, a spirit of rebellion and revolt began universally to shew itself. Agrippa made many efforts to repress this disposition, seeking unfeignedly to mitigate their sufferings, and to conciliate their regard by continued acts of kindness; and it is generally supposed that he prevailed to retard the burst of resistance, which at length broke through every restraint, and was demonstrated by open rebellion. In consequence of this insurrection he was obliged, by his duty to the Roman government, to take up arms against his people. The result to the Jews was desolation, according to the prophetic warning; and Jerusalem being destroyed, Agrippa retired to Rome to reside, where he lived with Berenice, unalarmed for futurity, and settled in his unchanged state as a sinner. He died at the advanced age of seventy years.

Agrippa is one of those affecting characters that awaken within us mixed feelings of regret and of condemnation. We regret that we must part with the pleasing hopes, which the more favourable parts of his disposition inspired ; and we condemn him, whilst we thus part, as one justly meriting the divine displeasure, and the rejection of his transitory feelings. They were unsound, the effect of superficial excitement without any due appreciation of Christ. Whilst we are endeavouring to form a just estimate of his character, we must learn to discriminate between what is amiable and hopeful in *our* eyes, and what is approvable in the eyes of Jehovah. Undeniably there were many things in Agrippa which demand a measure of our estimation. When we call to mind the baneful education and example which were before him from infancy, we are disposed highly to admire the manner in which he rose above these evils, so far as his official character is considered. He had seen in his father the most barbarous acts of cruelty and oppression ; he had witnessed in him a licentious depraved course, where pleasure ruled the day and night, and moral restraints were broken. He had been taught a *form* of true religion, and the need of attending to external rites, but he had witnessed in his parent a vile hypocrisy covered underneath a religious profession and an ostentatious shew of zeal. He could not be ignorant of Christianity ; his father had been its bloody persecutor, and no doubt would instruct his son in the same spirit, and endeavour to fire him with the same malicious purposes. These were all early disadvantages, both as it respected moral decorum, a spirit to govern, and a religious profession. In observing Agrippa, however, we find him exceedingly preserved from the extent of mischief which might have been thus entailed upon him. His public character demonstrates that he had a love

of toleration, justice, and benevolence ; he entered into the interests and feelings of other men, and liberally met their wishes and happiness, as far he could consistently. His pursuit of religious knowledge was not *spiritual*, yet it does not seem chargeable with the deliberate hypocrisy which he had seen in his father. He was satisfied with the letter and form of religion, for he was a dark and unconverted man ; yet he gave himself diligently to become acquainted with the divine institutions, and made great progress in this species of knowledge. He had not imbibed any prejudice against Christians, but allowed them to remain unmolested by his power : and it is probable, from the attention and interest he expressed in the discourse of Paul, that he had some secret favourable impressions respecting the faith. He was well acquainted with prophecy, he believed the inspired witness. He was aware from those scriptures of the doctrine of the resurrection. All this, with much more of intellectual discernment, had been attained by Agrippa ; and the apostle's powerful appeal to him, on these grounds, was like a seizure of the inward man, he, by the force of his penetration into the character of Agrippa, laying hold upon principles and views of which he was persuaded that he was the possessor. The design of the apostle was to shew the king, that according to his own scriptural views the doctrine of the sufferings and resurrection of Jesus was no objection to him as the Messiah, and that he ought to accept him as the true object of faith answering to the prophetic voice. Thus it appears that Agrippa was no infidel, neither destitute of religious knowledge or feeling, although ignorant of the spirituality of divine revelations. He listened with attention and candor. Light entered upon his mind, and his judgment became convinced. A passing emotion of integrity rushed across his heart, and notwithstanding the

surrounding scene of pomp, the observation of the assembly now turned wholly upon him, and proud reasonings which nature was ready suggest, he acknowledged his conviction of truths of the gospel, and his inclination to embrace the despised cross. Alas! the blossom soon perished, and left the visibly withered branch. Agrippa had no heart really to encounter shame or expose himself to requirements which would follow an *altogether* discipleship; and notwithstanding these strong emotions, he delivered himself up to the superior attraction of earthly objects. Thus, amiable, hopeful, convinced, and interesting as he may appear, in a *natural* point of view, he disappoints our expectation, and proves that the power of the cross, established in the affections of a sinner, is very different from the superficial sensibilities with which too many deceive themselves and others.

It yields us some comfort to see from the example before us, that the misery of having wicked parents, or of receiving a bad education, is not in all instances followed by the extent of ruin which we might expect from the indignation of the Lord, and from the naturally depraved passions of the heart. God is pleased sometimes in these instances to magnify the riches of saving grace, or the mercy of restraining power; and will sometimes choose his own vessels of salvation in these circumstances; or in pity prevent the destructive consequences of such an early training, by imparting the influence of checks, reflections, conscientiousness, and various amiable dispositions, so as to render the child less pestilential in society, and less aggravated in sins than he might have been. This is a consolatory reflection, leading up our thoughts to the amazing love and forbearance of Jehovah, which is always encompassed by the

glory of his own sovereignty, and causing us to have hope towards the most wretched, however un-
 umstanced, knowing that Almighty grace can save sinners in all situations, and that examples of this willing mercy have abounded in the earth. When such interpositions are *saving*, it should be a subject of indescribable joy; neither should we be insensible to the goodness which acts in *re-
 maining* grace. Let us however in a more especial manner use the present subject, for the purpose of impressing our minds with the evident difference between natural amiabilities and Christian sanctity. By this example we perceive how possible it is for a person to unite strict attention to the claims of justice towards man, with direct injustice before and unto the Lord; how an exact observance of all outward forms of religion may be carried on, whilst some secret sin is indulged; how a man may be apt in attaining the knowledge of all controversial questions, and of determining which accords with truth or with the divine revelation, whilst wholly devoid of any discernment into the customs, acts and principles of the saints, or any possession of *self*-investigation or expertness in discovering the condition of the inward man:—that there can be a reception of the *letter* of prophecy so far as respects heaven, hell, salvation, and the prominent truths of revelation, without any consistent *application* of these subjects to their proper ends or objects:—that deep and powerful conviction may pervade the judgment, whilst the heart remains in spiritual death, without one pulse that beats towards the cross:—that exclamations and passionate emotions may be followed by total insensibility upon the subject which transiently interested the heart! All *facts* in the case of Agrippa, and all repeatedly exhibited in the lives of professing Christians around ourselves. Since such deluded states are common, and men are

prone to satisfy themselves short of the experience which belongs to saving faith, we are bound to scrutinize our own condition, and to bring ourselves to a just touchstone.

Ere we content ourselves with a profession of Christianity, we have to inquire, whether we know what is meant by being a Christian? And we should answer this inquiry by the *Scripture standard*. This will shew us that it is not enough merely to be baptized with *water*, it is with *water and the Holy Ghost* that the real members of Christ's mystical body are baptized; and by this baptism they are put in possession of great peculiarities; they have the Scriptures unfolded to them in their spiritual meaning, the seals are loosed, and the secret of the Lord, as all contained in the work of salvation in Christ, is revealed. This revelation is made to a *prepared* heart, which by the same Spirit is softened, and rendered susceptible of the blessing that is thus communicated. The revelation is affectionately received, as a precious treasure to be hid in the bosom and lived upon by faith; and this life is developed in all the varied beauties which belong to a new Creation. This it is to be a Christian; and under these particular heads we may arrange innumerable accompaniments, which flow through these to the glory of God in a creature that is sanctified to him in body, soul, and spirit.

Let us next inquire what is intended by being *almost* persuaded to become such an one. This is a disposition which is produced by having an illuminated mind, accompanied with a moving impulse upon it from a convinced conscience. The glorious reality of the gospel in its doctrines, promises, and denunciations, is perceived by a clear light from heaven; in consequence it is seen with its allurements and its terrors, which each alternately or together assail the will, and demand a

submission to its authority ; a sense of individual necessity combines with the conviction of the gospel, and the judgment stands as it were contemplating the desirableness of a union between the necessitous soul and the object of faith proposed in the gospel. Certain strong emotions almost unintelligible to the agitated sinner attend this deliberation ; and the whole of the inward kingdom is thrown into a state of tumult, under the anxious hesitation of whether or not to admit the claims of Jesus, and by powerful *inclinations* so to do ? This is a condition very commonly experienced where the gospel is advocated, and men sit beneath its sound ; and during the continuance of this conflict, whether it be long or short, such persons are sometimes not ashamed of avowing that they feel this inclination, and are *almost* persuaded.

What is it then which prevents its being *altogether* a resolve to take the cross ? To this question there may be proposed as many answers as there are sinners in the earth ; for usually every man has his *own* particular reason for not closing with the overtures of the Lord. We have in general *one* depraved aversion to spirituality ; it accords not with our natural taste, and suits not the determined agreement we have with the world. But in addition to this, there is usually some hinging point on which the doubtful deliberation turns. This is a man's *darling lust* whatever it may be. Here the matter rests. If I am *altogether* a saint, I must *altogether* renounce my sins, my darling idol amongst the rest. There is the secret struggle, and in it the darling idol comes off victorious, unless God the Holy Ghost puts forth his omnipotence to turn the scale, and give victory to the cross.

The issue to this conflict is most serious ; should it end like the struggle in Agrippa, we are of all men the most miserable, having resisted the

strongest testimony that can be given to a natural mind. In such a case we assuredly perish ; for an almost Christian will neither suffer, conquer, nor reign. He is not engrafted into Christ, he therefore has no motives, no strength, and no promises for his portion. How seriously, therefore, should we meditate upon the affecting example before us—how deeply bewail the sensuality, idleness, and unbelief by which we are held back from Christ—how uprightly deprecate the judgments which shall come upon such disgraced souls, especially if found under the mask of a Christian name—and how importunately should we supplicate for the power to discern the Christian privileges, and for faith to appropriate them as our own ! This alone will be a *satisfactory* profession ; other objects fade and perish in the using. This object remaineth ever, for it is, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” O that he may now cast down every strong tower of the enemy, enter our hearts, and be everlastingly triumphant there.

PRAYER.

ETERNALLY blessed and gracious God, we come unto Thee in the sense of a condition, so wholly weak and necessitous, that unless we are strengthened and saved by Thee, we perish for ever. We cannot contemplate the affecting examples of indecision that are recorded in Thy word, without feeling a holy alarm and awe, lest there should be within us any thing like a divided heart ; and since we are not able so to search our hearts as to determine this question without the light of the Holy Ghost shining into them, we now lift up our prayer to ask for His presence, and wait upon Thee to be our guide in this important survey. O

may we leave no affection or feeling untried by Thy word ; may we bring every thought and imagination to the testimony of the cross. If there be in us any root of bitterness which springing up might trouble us, O do Thou powerfully dislodge it from our breast, and make us to yield to Thy operation however painful it may be, knowing that such discipline is needful for the health of the soul. We have great reason to trust Thee, O Lord, in the severest exercises to which we may be called ; because in all past experiences Thou hast tempered Thy judgments with mercy, and hast not rebuked us in wrath. Thou hast chastened us for our insincerity, indecision, cowardice, and fleshly propensities ; but Thou hast not given us over unto death ; and at this moment we are privileged to believe that Thou hast made us desire an *altogether* devotion to Thy blessed Name. O nourish these supernatural affections, and let them not suffer by any pestilential influence from the world, or by any deceitfulness of indwelling sin ; but grant that maturing in the experience of Thy salvation, we may exhibit the ripening fruit of a pure and simple faith. We pray Thee, gracious God, to pour forth upon Thy witnesses the baptism of the Spirit, to the increase of their simplicity and firmness in testifying of Thee ; and that it may please Thee in Thy infinite compassion to multiply the number of those who will stand forth to demonstrate that they are on the Lord's side ; and O may they, Lord, be steadfast under the banner of the cross, fight the good fight, and triumph in Thee. We implore Thee thus to visit Thy Israel in the everlasting covenant in Christ. Amen.

JULIUS.

Acts xxvii. 1, 3, 11, 31, 32, 43, 16.

WE have seen how the result of St. Paul's appeal to the Roman Emperor brought him into the situation of being put on board a vessel, with some other prisoners, in order to be brought to Rome. He was committed to the care of a Centurion whose name was Julius: and we now proceed to examine what may be discoverable of this character; as he was placed in a temporary connexion with the Apostle. The situation of Julius was one of authority and responsibility to the Roman government, for he was the leader of a band of one hundred soldiers, and was employed in services which involved the order and observance of the laws of the empire. We have no account of the spirit or disposition of this man in any part of his history, excepting what concerned his voyage with St. Paul, in which he appears as one animated by a constant aim at courtesy to the Apostle. In the storm which overtook the mariners, we have in some degree already considered his manifest good will towards his prisoner; although in the question of whether they should loose from the haven, and venture out to sea in the midst of the threatened dangers, he embraced the counsel of the captain of the vessel, in preference to the advice of Paul. It appears that during the tremendous tempest which blew upon them, the centurion imbibed still more favourable opinions of the Apostle, and a readiness to yield a more implicit attention to his advice. When on the shore where the vessel was wrecked, he had an opportunity during three months for more intimate association with

his christian companions, and evidently increased in his affection towards them. At Puteoli there were some believers who earnestly desired to detain the company awhile, for the sake of the refreshment of christian communion, to which Julius gave his consent, and they tarried there seven days. And when brought to Rome, where he must deliver up his prisoner, and bid him farewell, probably for ever in this world, he seems to have used his influence to obtain for him some indulgence; so that Paul was suffered to dwell alone, or separate from the rest of the prisoners, with one soldier to keep him as his guard.

These traits of character are very engaging; and judging of Julius by natural principles, we should say that he was a man very superior to many in his station; and actuated by more generous and disinterested affections, than usually appear in persons so situated. Probably he was a man of urbanity and benevolence, and if so, his treating Paul courteously was the natural result of his own disposition, and would be equally expressed towards any other man. Yet we are impressed by the history with the idea, that he had a more than ordinary feeling of regard to him; so that we may reasonably conclude he esteemed him to be an injured person, and that his cause was a just one. If such were his impressions when first they went on board, the closer observation of christian principle would necessarily confirm them; for he would see in the Apostle those dispositions of cheerful submission, serene confidence in God, and relative charity, for which Jesus' followers are ever remarkable. Yet we are not able to trace in Julius any *decided* marks of an understanding illumined by the Spirit. In his professed religion previously to his acquaintance with Paul, he was a heathen, and an idolater; of course, therefore, he was under the

power of that awful ignorance of the divine nature which belongs to the wretchedly enslaved realms where Satan thus maintains his dark empire. He knew nothing of the glorious self-existent Jehovah, nor of the blessedness of having an interest in One whose Omnipresence and Omniscience form the shelter and security of the saints. He was a stranger to the great truths of the gospel, and knew not the Lord Christ. The effects of this ignorance are easily traced in his conduct. Much as he personally respected Paul, he could not yield his confidence to his opinions, or trust his counsel as a servant of Jehovah ; and instead of admitting the influence of the inspired counsellor, he considered the judgment of an experienced mariner preferable. By this one act he unfolds to us the *nature* of his esteem for the Apostle, shewing that it was only as to an innocent and worthy man, whose character he considered unimpeachable, and that his views of the God whom he served, extended no further than to the supposition, that he was *one* of the number of the objects of worship, which men were at liberty to choose for themselves ; and he probably considered Paul's advice, founded as it was on a professed power of revealing things future, as a visionary and wild superstition. How far the accomplishment of this prediction wrought a change in his judgment, we are not informed ; but judging from the disposition evinced, we may hope the influence was extensive ; he became teachable and reduced—he manifested an increase of affection and confidence—he met the wishes of the apostle as a believer, affording him the enjoyments derived from intercourse with saints, and it is probable that at Puteoli he joined the little company, having had abundant cause in the preceding weeks and months of Paul's labour in the Island of Melita, to believe the power and truth of his testimony. It has not pleased the

Lord to satisfy our inquiry of how far all these influences were effectual or saving: at any rate Julius was a friend to Paul, and manifestly an instrument in the hand of God, to administer much comfort to him under his painful circumstances; and as the Scripture is silent respecting any further traits of his disposition, or history of his course, we must here drop the inquiry, and endeavour to derive from what is recorded the suitable benefit to our own souls.

We are surrounded by persons who exactly answer to the description of character which we have been contemplating; for these are features not confined to any particular age in the world, or rank in life; there are always those whose native temper is obliging and candid, and whose inclination is to extend a kind judgment towards all men. In this number they will include christians, not because they have discernment or love for them as such, but because they consider oppression to be villainy, and deeds of persecution inconsistent with humanity. If we are of this disposition, we are prepared to evince the same mind as Julius. When any occasion puts an injured christian before us, as a claimant upon our candour and kindness, we shall treat him courteously, we shall yield him the just expression of what his consistency evidently has a right to demand. It is happy for ourselves if we have such a natural disposition; it will save us many miseries arising out of a contrary temper, and is sometimes instrumental to open a way for further revelations of the divine will; and we should contemplate this example with the intention of seeking a kindred mind. Alas! it is awfully absent in many of the circles which boast of their politeness, their candour, their sensibility; but where a *christian* is considered lawful prey, and his case to be out of the range of those con-

cerns which demand compassion or justice from man, should one human breast in such scenes glow with a conscious shame of the spirit of illiberality, which riots upon the character and proceedings of the christian, let not the emotion die without expression ; let us call to mind the example of this heathen who is a reproach to many boasting the name of christian : and let us remember, that at any rate we are bound to treat the disciple, with the common courtesy which we would not deny to any other man. The further act of kindness which this man expressed towards Paul, calls for our imitation. Generous liberality will meet with affection all to whom it can impart any enjoyment ; they who are in authority may have much also in their power, by which to soften the trial of imprisonment, separation from friends, or loss of the usual indulgences belonging to the intercourse of believers ; and a just spirit will lead a man forth into the active use of his station to these ends. In christian interests it will induce a readiness to promote the blessed privilege of hearing, attending the means of grace, and having fellowship with God's people. Authority used for such objects, becomes a rich providential boon, both to the possessor and to all beneath their rule, and will not lose its reward ; for Jehovah is faithful to acknowledge man in his course, when integrity directs his way, and will not forget the smallest act of kindness done to a child of his. In his own equitable method he will recompense the deed according to its quality ; and we should endeavour to urge upon ourselves, and all in authority, the great importance of being actuated by a *just* rule, and of ministering to the advancement of every thing calculated to promote the comfort and interests of our fellow men.

Let us however be fully aware, that favour shewn to the Saints is not always favour towards their *Lord*. A variety of motives may influence us in

the first instance, which do not in the least affect our *spiritual* feelings. And when believers are consistent, it sometimes follows, that we admire them and love them for their loveliness, sweetness, sympathy, and singularity, remaining at the same time quite insensible to the beauty and glory of their Lord and king. If our fellowship with them be sincere, we shall embrace their counsel in preference to the opinion of the worldling; and having a holy reverence of the rule by which they are governed, which is the Scriptures of truth, we shall look to this same standard for the determination of our course; and even when it stands opposed to what the dictates of natural reasoning suggests, we shall *simply* accept the *divine* determination. There are some points of interest belonging to worldly affairs, wherein perhaps it will be argued, that men experienced in these, although destitute of faith, are the best advisers. It may be so, so far as the worldly prospect is considered, and a believer is at liberty to seek such help where he is himself ignorant; but he is not at liberty to seek it without reference to the judgment of the word of God. The opinion, and advice, of the wisest natural man must be tried by the Christian by his own divine rule, he must see that it does not militate against his faith and consistency, and that it may be embraced without entailing any peril on the soul. And certainly even here the counsel of a fellow Christian may prove very advantageous, by pointing out the rocks and quicksands where many have made shipwreck of faith, and by suggesting the necessity of deliberating in all temporal concerns with the Lord himself. Inattention to these requisites is always followed by some loss; we are plunged into unforeseen difficulties, which perhaps a natural man would not meet, because he is actuated by different principles; we find ourselves brought

into perilous circumstances endangering our integrity, or perhaps we are followed by chastisement for having acted imprudently, and are made ashamed of our own false dependence upon human speculation. It is better to avoid this by timely consideration ; or if already involved in the difficulty, it is desirable to act with instant decision in seeking the removal, or prevention of further evil, by becoming more teachable, more grateful for able counsellors, and more devoted to the object of promoting in simplicity the one interest of the kingdom of Jesus. Let us seek to manifest unquestionable marks of our union with the children of God in *the Spirit*. Let us cast in our lot with them, not by mere accident as belonging to providential circumstances, but by deliberate preference, as influenced by the same covenant grace. And let us endeavour to feed in the same pastures, to rejoice in the same refuge, and to anticipate the same final home. This will be a pledge to us of an eternal reunion with those who are bought by the same blood, in that blissful port where there shall be no more storm, and where the rescued in Christ Jesus are for ever at peace.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, Thou only Sovereign and Lord of all creation, Thou God of salvation and life, hearken unto us, we humble supplicate Thee, and let our cry come into Thy presence. We kneel down before Thee as penitents humbly confessing our sin ; and prostrate ourselves at Thy feet waiting for the visitation of Thy mercy. O look Thou upon us in the riches of Thy covenant, and spare us, blessed Lord, for we cast ourselves upon Jesus the Lord. We confess unto Thee the great burden of sin and misery under which we groan ; and that

in every example which we contemplate in Thy word, we discover the representation of evils which we find to exist in ourselves. So prolific of evil is our sinful nature, so depraved and deceitful is our wicked heart ! O give us, we earnestly pray Thee, Thy own regenerating grace, and make us savingly to partake of the new and eternal life treasured up in Jesus, which life we would desire by vital union with Him. Shew pity, Lord, upon our dark and ignorant mind, and send out Thy light and Thy truth to guide us ; and O may we be able to discern what is the inheritance of the saints in Christ, and to love and appropriate the unspeakable blessing. We desire to feel the great blessing bestowed upon us, when we are by Thy providence brought into association with Thy people ; especially if it be with such as are eminently owned and used by Thee ; and we bless Thee if we have also received a disposition to estimate them from the ground of our heart. But give us, O Lord, a still more decided proof that we are one with them in eternal hopes. Let not our affection to them be merely natural, or an association with them temporary and closed by this life, but grant that we may be cemented by the Holy Ghost, may love as brethren, and may be nurtured unto the final perfection of joy in Thy rest above. Thus dwell in us by Thy omnipotent love, subduing our whole heart to Thyself, and consecrating all our days to Thy service and glory. Hear us mercifully, and answer us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our ever blessed Lord. Amen.

TITUS.

2 Corinthians vii. 6.

WE have scarcely any record which respects the character of Titus, yet it would seem improper wholly to pass by a person who, from the little we can gather, occupied so eminent a station in the church, and to whom St. Paul addressed an epistle. It is remarkable, that although so intimate a companion and associate of the apostle, he is never mentioned in the Acts. He is however frequently presented before us in the Epistles. From these we learn that he was a Greek; probably converted through the labours of Paul, who speaks of him as his son in the faith, Gal. ii. 3; Titus i. 4. One of his chief scenes of labour was Corinth; to which place he was frequently sent by Paul on errands of importance to that church. Thus he was employed in transacting what belonged to the affecting call for repentance recorded 2 Cor. vii. 6. He was also sent to arrange what was necessary in the collections made for the poor, 2 Cor. v. 6. But his more expressly stationary labours were in the island of Crete, where a church was planted by Paul, but the management of all its concerns committed to Titus; Titus i. 5. Here it is generally supposed that he usually resided, and that he died in this island at the advanced age of ninety-four years.

We have before us one of those striking examples of the Lord's sovereign grace with which the blessed kingdom of Jesus so richly abounds; here the mind is once more refreshed by a view of the mercies of the covenant to the Gentiles; and in Titus we see what the Holy Spirit effects,

when liberating a soul by the power of Jesus' cross. His idols, ignorance, and bondage to Satan, fell before the omnipotent Spirit in the word, and left, in place of a deceived servant of darkness, a visibly sanctified and enlightened disciple of the Lord of light. The purpose of grace to his soul was not confined to the call which placed him amongst the more private believers; he was ordained to run a public course, was appointed to act as a missionary and worker in the Lord; and for these services he was powerfully animated by the Holy Ghost; discharging them with integrity and fervent love. We discover the excellent dispositions in which he discharged his responsibilities, by the several expressions of affection and estimation that are united with his name in the scriptures. He seems to have preserved a strong and grateful affection towards St. Paul as his spiritual parent, continuing with him in the exercise of unfeigned fellowship, of the highest and most sacred description; he was the Apostle's partner and fellow-helper, 2 Cor. viii. 23. In promoting the interests of holiness he was evidently zealous, and fervent in spirit; both in Corinth and in Crete earnestly exhorting to the life of repentance, devotion, and industry. In these labours his sympathy was unfeigned; he is described as having comfort and joy and refreshment in proportion to the possession of true spiritual riches, by the saints; and as having a holy delight in the manifestation of the Spirit's fruits, as he contemplated them in the penitent Corinthians; see 2 Cor. vii. 6, 7, 13—15. In the discharge of his important services he evinced a disinterested and lowly mind: without any envious feelings respecting the superior influence and affection acknowledged by the Corinthians to Paul, he affectionately related to him all which he had witnessed and heard of this description, 2 Cor. vii. 6. With a cheerful readiness

he accepted the trust which respected temporal interests, being willing to enter upon comparatively lower offices, and to be servant of all in whatever he might be useful to the body, 2 Cor. viii. 16. In all these responsibilities maintaining an honourable Christian independence, to which the Apostle appeals in his behalf, when contending with a fickle and ungrateful spirit of some at Corinth 2 Cor. xii. 18. With all this humility, and regulated feeling, we find him uniting a bold and determined disposition ; he joined St. Paul with his whole soul, in contending for the great doctrines of the gospel, not yielding to any of the subtle arguments by which Gentile liberty was infringed, Gal. ii. 3. 5. ; and amongst the Cretians he also exhibited the same character, maintaining his labours amidst many obstacles, and difficulties, peculiarly existing amongst those for whom he laboured ; whose native characters and propensities formed great hinderances to the attainment of high spirituality, and might have proved deadening and disheartening to the spirit of Titus. St. Paul writing to him reminds him that he will have to contend with men unreasonable, vain, and puffed up—fleshly and gross in their habits—and notorious for lying, see Titus i. 10—13. These were terrible accompaniments of our fallen state, which, as forming the prominent character of men, would necessarily occasion to the spiritual worker amongst them much trouble, many anxieties, and needing great resolution. The whole epistle to Titus demonstrates, that such were his circumstances as a minister, calling for great simplicity, and a mind that could rise to the supports and supplies of the covenant with peculiar vigour ; see Titus ii. 1. 8. 15 ; iii. 1. 2. 9. In these qualifications we have reason to believe his soul was enriched, and that he fulfilled his course with steadfastness, glorifying his Saviour and God.

The great truth of revelation, that the desert all blossom and the wilderness be as the garden the Lord, is interestingly set forth by this view of a soul once like the blasted heath, and by the situation of the Spirit made an Eden full of spiritual fruits: and we are encouraged by all such evidences of the power of the promise, for the Lord is ever the same, and fills the vessels of his mercy with a glorious demonstration of his own faithfulness. The Holy Ghost will never fail to effect the new creation in all its lovely parts, producing in his subjects every thing that can manifest the triumphs of the cross over the powers of hell. The real convert will in consequence possess all those excellent affections which we admire in Titus. External circumstances and appointments, may make a difference as to the more visible developement of one grace than another, but the divine principle contains in it all the parts of the new creature, and we must look for the features of that holy thing so produced, and not be satisfied until we discover them. There must be an enlarged affection towards the church of Christ, embracing the interests of the whole body with generous disinterested love, constraining us according to our ability to work for the advancement of whatever may tend to the holiness, order, and support of the faithful. If we are acquainted with the occasion or instrument used by the Lord for the conversion of our own souls, we shall have a grateful recollection of all the circumstances leading to such an important event; and particularly shall bear in our hearts the tenderest sense of that benefit, as received through one towards whom we are now bound to demonstrate faithful returns. Our spiritual parent in Christ will be dear to our soul with strong and unshaken love: we shall endeavour to prove this by sharing in the cares and interests and labours of his way;

in which we may find many opportunities for affording to such an one the comfort which will be most welcome. Should we be connected by this relation with the minister or public witness for truth, we should be willing to contribute our proportion of help in the service, readily accept commissions to go upon the errand of reproof or comfort to be administered to needy souls, affectionately give an heart and hand to further such institutions as have Christ's kingdom in view; labouring in conjunction with our spiritual parent, and humbly accepting the counsel which experience and the authority belonging to such a relation would enforce. These are proofs of gratitude, and fruits of a lively faith, in which most persons may in measure have the call visibly to display. In most places where a Christian ministry is established and owned, there are consequent institutions designed for the benefit of the parish: a society—a flock in that place—Sunday schools—collections for the poor—times of ministering to the sick, and various other designs of love and charity growing out of the blessed profession of the faith, and shedding their salutary influence both on body and soul. To every calling of this description we should give ourselves to the utmost of our ability, fulfilling what Paul declares of Titus, “my partner and fellow-helper concerning you!” This is a line of labour very essential to the advancement of the internal order and beauty of a church; and it is one that more properly devolves upon those active members, who truly live in and rejoice in the privileges of the gospel, so as to leave the more particularly ordained, or the more eminently appointed minister, to the special works belonging to the dispensation of the word. Persons so devoted will find that in watering others they are themselves watered; so that great increase is made by their souls in this department. It was

the privilege of Titus to occupy a *ministerial* office as pastor of a church, yet he as readily embraced the circumstance which occasionally placed him in an inferior mode of ministration. Thus we all should cherish a disposition so simply devoted to the Lord, that whatever he may bid us do, we shall *love* to do. The work of ministering is before us in the example of Titus, and is unveiled in its beautiful simplicity, as to be discharged in righteousness, with self-government, in temperance, in liberality, and as a steward. That it consists of a comprehensive embracing of the cases of souls whatever they may be, calling out rebuke, excitement, and *personal* addresses suited to the particular characters addressed. The spirit of one who is benefited by the ministry is equally presented as unveiled and conspicuous to the eye of the inquirer; demonstrating that the heart of a believer is affected by gratitude, humility, reverence to the instrument through whom the unspeakable gift has been bestowed; and such a sense of the distinguishing mercy bestowed in salvation, as will fix the heart on him by whom redemption has been wrought.

These graces were effected in Titus—these truths of Christianity were taught by him: and whether they address us as teachers or hearers, his practice and his precepts should be appreciated by us all.

PRAYER.

Most gracious Lord and Saviour, enable us, we pray Thee, to embrace every merciful help which Thou art pleased to afford towards the furtherance of the heavenly life in our souls; and O do Thou in Thy great compassion render every record of Thy word an opened channel through which the

life of faith may be shed into our hearts and cherished there. We pray Thee to awaken the affections which answer to the character given of Thy children in the Scriptures of truth, so that the simplest passage may be instrumental to quicken us in our conformity to Thee. We bless Thee for Thy recovering power applied to our souls, by which alone it is that we are delivered from sin and death; and we pray Thee to look into our ways so as to regulate them according to the grace we have received. O may the love of Thy people be strongly felt within our souls; may our gratitude to Thee be expressed by a heartfelt delight in all Thy interests and concerns in the earth; and turn our diligent attention, O Lord, to the things of Thy kingdom, causing us to devote our every talent or power to Thy service. We look to Thee with our offerings of love, of praise, of devotion; we prostrate our hearts as a humble sacrifice at Thy feet; O Jesus, accept them, and give them a resting place in Thyself. But let us not be insensible to those claims which are upon us from the favoured instruments used by Thee, and made effectual in our behalf. O Lord, we would ever receive them in Thee, we would return their affection and care for our souls by the expression of unfeigned sympathy in all their cares, and to the utmost of our ability we would contribute help to their labours, and work with them in Thy cause. Most graciously consider how much of mercy and strength from Thee we require, in order to enable us in the discharge of these responsibilities, and O give us out of the fulness that is treasured up in Jesus Christ momentary aid, and all-sufficient strength. We know that Thou perfectest strength in weakness, and that our helpless condition is no hinderance to the prosperity of a spiritual existence, which from first to last proceeds from Thee: therefore, poor and impotent as

we are, we will emulate the example of Thy eminent saints, and will strive to attain the triumphs of a simple faith. In this blessed grace teach us, Lord, how to overcome every difficulty that rises before us. Let no fatigues of body, no anxieties of mind, no evils in men discourage our zeal; rather make us to rise higher in vigour the more we are pressed upon by trial; and to manifest that although our tribulations may abound, our consolations abound likewise. Lord, answer our earnest supplications, and dwell in us in all situations and circumstances as our all in all. Amen.

H.

ONESIMUS.

Col. iv. 9. Philemon 1—21.

THE particulars recorded of Onesimus, in the Epistle to the Colossians, are very few : he is there mentioned only in his character as a disciple of Jesus, and in this service as faithful, a beloved brother, and one of the true church. But we have further information in St. Paul's Epistle to Philemon, and learn from it that Onesimus was originally a servant, or domestic slave, in the house of Philemon, where he had been guilty of fraudulent practices against his master ; that he had also either from fear of detection, or some other motive, made his escape, and run away from his service. The place of Philemon's residence was Colosse ; but Onesimus fled to Rome, many hundred miles distant. Here he was induced to go and hear Paul, who was at that time suffering his first imprisonment in Rome, and engaged in giving lectures on Christianity, in his own hired lodging. It pleased the Lord to bless the word to the conversion of this fugitive, who being effectually called, united himself with Christians, and especially rendered himself very serviceable to the Apostle. It seemed necessary, however, that Philemon should be made acquainted with this circumstance, and that restitution should be made to him for the injury he had received. Accordingly Paul wrote to him the Epistle contained in the Scriptures, in which he affectionately pleaded the cause of the offender, declared his thorough change of character, his own great love for him as a sinner rescued from destruction, the peculiar comfort he had derived from this mercy as a token of God's

love to him in his bonds, and his assurance that he was now prepared to be *profitable* in the highest sense of the term. He also speaks of the wish he had to have retained him as a comfort in his hours of trial, but that he had rather consulted for what was equitable towards Philemon. Onesimus was therefore sent back to wait his master's determination towards him, but with the expectation, and entreaty of the Apostle, that he might be received as a brother in Christ with full confidence; at the same time Paul engaging to stand surety for him, in whatever respected the temporal things in which restitution was required. It is recorded in histories referring to these events, that he received from his master an entire forgiveness, that he then discharged the duties which had been committed to him towards the church at Colosse, as Col. iv. 8, 9. and that being liberated by Philemon, he returned to Rome, where he continued to minister to Paul, that he afterwards entered the ministry, and that his life was surrendered in martyrdom. How far this was true of him we are not scripturally informed, but we are sufficiently furnished with particulars that are unquestionable in this inspired witness.

The particular condition of Onesimus, both before and after his conversion, demand our special attention. Previously to the operation of the grace of the Lord, he was in most wretched circumstances. A slave to Satan, and with a mind totally unimpressed with a sense of duty either to God or man. He is declared to have been *unprofitable*, (ver. 11.) but he was not only unprofitable but *dishonest*, (ver. 18.) he lived in the abuse of the confidence placed in him by his master, and secretly purloined his goods. His sin was rendered more aggravated, by the advantageous circumstances in which he was placed, for Philemon's was a *Chris-*

tian's house, and a house eminently regulated by Christian principle. There therefore, he had many privileges, both from precept and example. Alas ! they were abused, unknown, and lost to him. That he had a conviction of guilt is evident ; but it operated no further than to generate terrors of mind, fear of punishment from man, and dread of exposure to his master ; and all ~~his~~ object seems to have been to secure his escape from these impending dangers. The wonderful purposes of grace were magnified by the choice of such a miserable sinner, to be one of the blood-bought and ransomed heirs of the eternal promise, and the fugitive was *prevented* by loving kindness and the power of Christ. Hard and impenitent as he had been under the roof of his devoted master, a day of God's power was in reserve for him, wherein the rock was smitten, and genuine repentance produced. By what secret motives he was induced to turn his steps to Paul's dwelling we know not. It might be the result of curiosity or idleness, or the act of a wicked vagrancy of disposition, glad to engage itself in any passing amusement ; or it might arise from restless misery, a heart ill at ease, a conscience burdened and willing to seek relief. But whatever were the secret springs of action by which he was at that time actuated, certain it is, that the Lord's overruling influence was there, working by these, and bringing him under that sound of the gospel which was now to be made effectual. The truth entered his heart, and the whole man was arrested and turned to the Lord. The unquestionable fruit which resulted from this change served to awaken joy in the breast of the aged Apostle—a joy which his after conduct confirmed and deepened. In each of the appellations given him we trace the warmth of the Apostle's heart, and the excellence of the convert's course ; otherwise he would not have been accounted a

brother—he could not have been esteemed *beloved*, nor have had the decided voice of the inspired *advocate* of his cause, that he was *one of those* united in one mystical and living body. He also marks the evident *change* effected on him, by particularly declaring as contrasted with his former conduct, that he was now *faithful* and *profitable*. It must have occasioned some distress and pain to Onesimus to return to his early scenes, where he had committed villainy, where he had lost his character, where his injured master dwelt, and where he must submit to the mortification of confessing his crime, and of throwing himself upon the clemency of Philemon. But having truly experienced all the abasement and sorrow of a penitent before the throne of God, having passed through those affecting exercises which accompany the casting of the whole soul upon the covenant clemency of his Saviour, he was prepared to encounter this humiliation before men, and able to leave the determination of his future lot with that eternal Saviour, in whose disposal are the hearts and determinations of all men.

By these decisive fruits of true conversion Onesimus justified the hopes of his father in the gospel; and was thus by the wonderful purpose of the Lord prepared to exercise a ministry in that word of salvation, which embraces sinners of every description, washing them, and sanctifying them, and justifying them in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. Onesimus would be able from painful experience of the hardness of a sinner's heart, to act with patience and diligence in exhibiting Christ crucified before the eyes of men; and the knowledge of himself as a monument of grace would teach him believing expectations in the behalf of other poor sinners like himself.

Many interesting and important lessons are

afforded us by this history. It presents us with an affecting view of human misery and of divine mercy. The station of a servant is more important than we generally imagine or admit. Men are too much accustomed to consider it merely as a state of dependence, they who serve looking chiefly at its *hardships*, and they who are served principally contemplating the real or supposed neglect, &c. of such as they govern. These are evils attendant upon man's propensity to look at the things which refer chiefly to himself and his own conveniences, rather than to embrace a brother's interests. As it respects the condition of service, it is not either so degrading or so full of hardship, as it is the custom of the servant to think ; the affairs of this world not being so *unequally* disposed as to a superficial observer might appear. If a servant has not the *independence* of his master, he has fewer cares ; his own duties lie within the circle of a settled round of obligations, which are within his compass, and which by industry and application, may be discharged with comfort to himself. He has nothing to consult for, if he is a domestic servant like Onesimus, but only to discharge the few claims which devolve upon him for the clothing of his person ; he lives free from the cares of providing food, a house, or of meeting claims from the world entailed upon a higher rank of life. If he has humility and contentment, he possesses in his *lot* many things which render him (possibly) happier than the richer man he serves. That it is *respectable* experience will prove. A servant is as necessary to his master as the master is to him. And when he is faithful he becomes a special treasure, is beloved by those to whom he is thus profitable, and respected by all who know his fidelity. But there are particular temptations belonging to this station, which it requires great uprightness to resist so as to keep *clean hands*. Many have oppor-

tunity for committing positive thefts, especially if they are entrusted with domestic concerns; but where this degree of sin is abhorred, many are found betrayed into purloining, acts of cheating, connivance at the dishonesty of others, unprofitableness, and offences, which although they do not strike our observation so quickly, or do not perhaps come exactly under the lash of the civil law, are in fact a breach upon the good principle and fidelity that ought to be maintained. The baneful *customs* that have prevailed in families, and have escaped detection or censure, gradually obtain a licence amongst men; so that deeds condemned by gospel precepts as *dishonest*, are justified by habit as altogether lawful. It requires a very just principle, and a very courageous mind, in any one who as a servant will resist these temptations, and testify against these practices. Young persons when first going out into service, ought to be cautioned by the more experienced against falling into such snares. The offence may possibly never be known in this world, but it is registered in the mind of God, and will be judged at his dreadful tribunal; and frequently habits of this description do make advances which lead to exposure, and through which disgrace, and loss of character, and loss of life, and a vagabond existence, are evils induced; so that the beginnings of the sin, which were but like the imperceptible mote, gradually swell into the visible and monstrous condition of a notorious transgression.

We have a very impressive example in the case of Onesimus, of too many in every age, to whom the blessings belonging to situations where Christian privileges abound are of small import. When we seriously contemplate the interests of eternity, possibly we all admit that Christian association is very desirable; and some persons are glad to place their children, or friends, where they hope their

souls will be cared for. But the privilege is not always practically understood or embraced. Servants are sometimes awfully insensible to the blessing which God's providence has thus provided; they consider family prayer a burden and interruption to their worldly business, which they had rather avoid; they look upon the requirements of their master respecting the Sabbath as an infringement upon their day of pleasure and idleness. Such frequent attention to ordinances is deemed a weariness, and a thousand lying expedients are invented, by which to impose upon those to whom they must give an account of the day. Their conduct becomes a dishonour to the family they serve, and a reproach to religion; and their own souls are steeped in hypocrisy and condemnation. Such examples are innumerable in this evil world, and we should not be surprised or offended at the gospel, when we find this experimentally under our own roof, or know it to be in the family concerns of our neighbour. These are awful abuses of privilege, for which the abuser is tremendously answerable before God, and will be judged either by final woe from the insulted Saviour, or by the sorrows attendant upon such a course, and the misery of after reflection, if grace ever reach the heart.

But let us not despair of the recovery of such sinners: the grace of Jesus is infinite, and all manner of sin can be subdued by the Omnipotent Spirit. There is no case of insensibility, nor any of aggravated offence, that exceeds the power of the eternal God to overcome; and as the Lord always acts in his own sovereignty, it may be that the very persons who have resisted *our* efforts, and have lived under our influence only to impose upon and deceive us, may be reached by *another* instrument, and the very extremity of such an one's wretchedness be the occasion, when the

miserable heart is brought to see that there is no true good but in Christ. When servants, for instance, have been placed under domestic privileges, they will almost necessarily obtain some *information* upon religious topics; and when they sin against light, they as necessarily lay up for themselves great sources of self-reproach; and, in the midst of their wickedness and vagrancy, will frequently carry about with them a painful sense of ruin: this may be instrumental to put them upon bearing the gospel, if it be in their power, and of turning into those places where saints are assembled. Here mercy may effectually visit them, and like Onesimus they may be savingly awakened to their real interests. Should any in such circumstances come under our observation, we should urge upon them the necessity of manifesting repentance, in the spirit evinced by this penitent. Confession of sin is required to the persons against whom we have offended, if it be in our power to make restitution, or if by such an acknowledgment the Lord's name may be glorified. And in all instances where this appears to be called for, whatever pain may be occasioned to the heart, or mortification to the pride of self, it will be the part of an honest mind to make the sacrifice. Newness of life will be manifested, especially on those points where the sinner has been most defective, and he will now be *profitable* and *faithful*; if returning to the service of his former master, labouring to demonstrate a proportion of diligence answerable to his peculiar circumstances; and if placed in a more exalted station, exhibiting in it how truly he has been brought into the fellowship of the gospel, so as to be a *brother beloved*, and *one* with the saints.

We possess an important lesson upon this subject, as it respects the spirit of a *believing master*. When a man is raised like Philemon to a station

in which he may exert his authority, to the establishment of order and Christian means in his family, he is called upon to discharge this responsibility faithfully. Station is a talent for which we must give an account ; and masters of a family are required to establish family worship, to exhibit the cross by precept and practice, endeavouring to win the soul of every domestic he has. He will usually be blest in this work of love ; especially, if like Philemon he is blest with a wife like Apphia, one who with himself believes in the Lord. He will be privileged like him also to have a *church in his own house*, and whilst presiding in the midst of these little assemblies, may look for descending operations of grace from the Lord. And although he may have an Onesimus in that assembly, he must not be discouraged ; he probably has others who are *brethren* in the Lord. In these he may rejoice ; and a Christian master is bound to admit them to be *one* in this relation, and to give that tribute of estimation and encouragement which is due to servants so faithful, so profitable, and having such just claims to be beloved ; considering them, as the apostle expresses it, “above a servant, a brother beloved,” verse 16. And should the wanderer return, we are bound to receive him, giving glory to God for his salvation ; in receiving him, exercising humility and sympathy, knowing that we all are servants to a higher Master ; that we all have defrauded him and sought to escape from him ; and that had we not had one who voluntarily stood forward to plead our cause, and to say, “I will be Surety for him,” we must have perished by the just sentence of the broken law. This should teach us mercy out of a lowly heart, and make us ever willing to accept the testimony of repentance, however deeply the penitent may have injured us.

Let us reflect upon all these particulars, ac-

ording to our several stations in the world, or in the professing church ; and each be stimulated to discharge our own responsibilities as unto the Lord, with greater industry and simplicity ; blessing him if it is our privilege to live together under one roof, meeting as a family consecrated to Christ, and looking for the inheritance that awaits us in him, when the universal family shall be gathered home.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, with earnest entreaties for Thy blessing we now kneel down before Thee, and wait for the manifestation of Thy everlasting compassion. In respect of our condition in Thy sight, we are not better than the sinner whose case we have considered ; for Thou art our Master, yet we have not honoured Thee ; and Thou hast committed many things to our trust, in which, alas ! O Lord God, we have been unfaithful. We cannot plead guiltless—we cannot offer any excuse—we are undone for ever if we possess not the interceding voice of Jesus as our Surety : our present sorrow will not repay Thee for all that we have wronged Thee in ; and amends we are not able to propose, excepting in that blessed Lord who has undertaken to bear the weight of our responsibility before Thee ! Forgive us, for his name's sake, and blot out the handwriting that is against us. And O do more for us, put on us the blessed righteousness of our Surety, that he may not only deliver us by suffering in our stead, but give us liberty, and glorious access even to Thy bosom of love, by his obedience, which answers all Thy law. In this holy liberty, O our God, help us to glorify Thee, by a visibly new existence : put into us that invigorating influence, which shall call

forth Thy own grace in us, to fervent demonstration of what Thou hast effected in our behalf. O may we be profitable, faithful, and beloved ! May we be manifestly one with Thy redeemed body, and consecrate our whole remaining days to Thy service. We see, O Lord, how invariably the love of Christ constrains the souls of the regenerate to spend and be spent for Thee ; and we desire to be added to the number of these. O grant us the grace that is necessary for maintaining this evidence, and rest upon us, Thou Almighty God, with the mighty power of Thy Spirit. O may we be truly humble, meekly dependent, and zealously laborious. May we confess that we are unworthy, that we have sinned ; and be willing to make restitution to man, according to our ability. And, O Saviour, establish Thy kingdom in its glorious majesty within our hearts, that we may live to Thee, and love Thee steadfastly in life and death, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

DIOTREPHES.

3 John 9—11.

WE enter upon the consideration of the character and dispositions of Diotrophes, a person only mentioned in the scriptures once, but who seems to have been of some importance in the time when St. John wrote his epistle to Gaius. He is generally supposed to have been a minister of the gospel; and the history of his conduct, given in the few verses before us, leaves us little hesitation in believing this; for otherwise, it would seem, that he could not have exercised the power which is there ascribed to him. It is immediately evident that he lived in the indulgence of a spirit which brought him under severe apostolical censure; and that, notwithstanding his profession of the gospel, he was considered as an enemy of the cause.

It is most probable that Diotrophes possessed mental talents: it is evident he had *influence*. His first profession of the gospel seeming to be sincere, he was in consequence entrusted with the care of a portion of the Lord's vineyard, wherein he exercised his powers. This was a situation highly gratifying to his natural character. He was ambitious of obtaining rule and authority, and of possessing the supreme regard of men; his leading characteristic feature being love of *pre-eminence*. As a preacher, or ruler, he was invested with a degree of influence which he could not endure to see in any measure liable to decrease; and being envious of the reputation of other believers, or labourers, he at length degenerated into the condition of a persecutor. This spirit, how-

ever, was cloaked under the continued profession of the gospel. He had no intention to relinquish his station or character as a Christian minister: his object, on the contrary, was to establish his own honour upon the depression of others; and to promote this, he not only refused admittance to his vineyard to any of the missionary visitants who came within his power, but exerted his influence to prevent their being encouraged or received, by any of those who were under his direction. The *Lord's ambassadors*, men who for Jesus' sake went forth taking nothing of the Gentiles, lest their message should be prejudiced thereby—*brethren* in the faith of the gospel, whose affections and lot constrained them to be united in one bond with all the faithful—were persons resisted and opposed by Diotrephes; who, in a spirit of pride and violence, anathematized any in his congregation who dared to deviate from his command or example. A further sin is charged upon him. Being anxious to prevent any censure that might fall upon him for such proceedings, he endeavoured to justify them by invectives, and slanders, and calumnies, uttered against the Lord's messengers, pouring forth upon them the most injurious aspersions, and misrepresenting their motives and works; and this not in ignorance, or as the effect of hasty resentment or an inconsiderate mind, but deliberately and maliciously, with the express purpose of casting out of the church those very men by whose disinterested labours the flock of Jesus had been so eminently blest. These were fatal crimes, all arising out of one prolific root, love of *pre-eminence*. By this corruption he was led into pride, arrogance, usurpation of undue authority, a spirit of persecution, rushing into falsehood, slander, and injustice; and, as the apostle John describes him, becoming a follower of evil, and evincing that notwithstanding his high profession

of religion, he had never seen God ; he had not received that divine manifestation of God in Christ which is transforming in its blessed influence ; neither had he any fellowship with the Holy Ghost : his dispositions and spirit were evidently unhallowed by Him.

This is an awful instance of the effects of the fall, and of the depravity which works invidiously in the hearts of sinners, corrupting them even in the things whereof they are the most vain, and taking them captive in snares that the flesh renders *pleasurable* delusions ! Diotrophes arrived at greatness, and became contemptible : he thought to have secured to himself a name amongst the Christians for zeal, for power, and authority ; but he exposed himself to degradation by coming under the apostolic rebuke ; and has prevailed only to have a record where infamy is attached to his name. This is the way in which vainglorious persons are always entrapped. Vanity blinds their eyes ; they walk in darkness, not discerning their true character, nor perceiving the opinions that men entertain of them. Bent only upon self-exaltation, they look only to what will flatter them with the hope of success ; and usually under an infatuation of mind, they adopt measures by which they became exposed to the observation and reproach of their fellow men. All this is true of Diotrophes, who has left his memory to succeeding generations, under the perpetual stain of a vainglorious censorious adversary to the true cause of Jesus, whilst he wore the garb of zeal, and would have passed amongst his people for an *eminent* leader.

There is no corruption more common than the evil we thus condemn in Diotrophes : in various forms it awfully pervades the human mind, and betrays the wretched soul into innumerable deeds

of a diabolical kind ; causing the miserable votary to vanity and pride, to rush upon the most extravagant attempts at pre-eminence, and to connive at the sin in his own breast with a desperate infatuation, the most bewildering and destructive to himself. In the very same steps which were trod by Diotrephes, there are many at this day, arrogantly bearing their heads high, and daringly resisting the example that this record presents. They hope to establish their character for a certain description of zeal, whilst they oppose themselves to what they represent as zeal *out of order*. They desire to exhibit fervor, care, and a spirit to work amongst their own people, but they place a strict boundary past which not even the most eminent or approved of the Lord's servants must presume to proceed ; and every attempt that is made by the missionary, or by the lover of truth, to awaken interests beyond the narrow precincts of that church or society to which the proud bigot has given his attention, is considered an offensive intrusion, and reprobated as an unchristian act, or as a robbery upon the pre-eminence that is considered by him due to himself. This is a disposition frequently attended with envy of the talents or popularity which the Lord's servants may have attained ; a passion which is cruel and merciless, and has no satisfaction equal to that of depreciating excellence, and darkening the *motives*, if not the character, of the object against whom it burns. It is a very awful fact, that such a bondage to Satan can exist under a flaming religious profession ; and that men who boast of their unfeigned desire for the advance of Jesus' kingdom, can be found under the dominion of a haughty self-seeking violence of temper, which would be disgraceful to a natural man making no pretensions to religion ; but which in one who is continually presenting the image of Jesus before others through preaching,

becomes a frightful offence, and a scandal to the cause. We ought to receive the passage of scripture which is before us with a serious application to ourselves, if we are in any degree placed in the situation of occupying important religious offices. Since it is evident that a sinner's heart is capable of fostering the most baneful passions under the cover of the most spiritual, our suspicion should fall upon ourselves, and teach us to look well into the various concerns in which we are engaged, and the secret dispositions in which they are discharged. That there is a natural propensity in us all to seek and love pre-eminence is undeniable: we trace its operation from the first dawnings of reason and passion, varying in its particular form only, according to the difference of disposition which we each possess. The little child early demonstrates its love of power; it manifestly delights in receiving tributes of peculiar attention; and as years advance, it developes this propensity with greater vigour. The station which he fills will give different shades to the expression of this natural evil; but if we will observe man as he matures into life, and occupies his various conditions, we shall discover that *pre-eminence* is the universal aim. In riches, in equipage, in dress, in beauty, in talent, in skill, in power of argument, in popularity, in the possession of love, friendship, or favour; in short, in every thing interesting to man, or belonging to him as an inhabitant of this fallen world, this leaven works, and poisons the streams which ought to run in wholesome and refreshing influences in the earth. It is an evil which is cherished by education, indulgence, and the flattery of false or misguided friends. And in instances where there does in reality exist an evident superiority to others, the flattery finds abundant provision on which to act; and the poor soul surrenders itself to the pleasing delusion,

hoping to be and to appear above the rest of those who are moving in the same line of duties or station.

We must not conclude that this sin is so extirpated from the breast of man, as a regenerate creature, that the children of God have nothing to fear from its malignant effects: alas, it is possible, even for these to be defiled by a lamentable remainder of the evil. Not that it can exist in a believer with such accompaniments as malice, persecution, calumnies, and misrepresentations of the saints : these are crimes which belong to an unconverted state, demonstrating that such an one has not seen God ; but the lesser measure of this evil which leads into selfishness, vanity, and which defiles the souls with envy, it is possible to find even with those in whom we hope there is the *root* of the matter, or the possession of a principle of holiness. But in all such cases, whilst we trust that God has been seen, we must lament that he has been seen but *dimly*. A full sight of God in Christ will always lead to self-abasement: it will put the mind upon those affecting calculations which bring in the soul *debtor*, not only to God, but to man ; and it will inspire the heart with such *true* love as embraces Jesus, looking for elevation only in him, and delighting to behold his name and cause in a state of prosperity and furtherance, by whatever means it may be promoted. This being the case, a christian sins grievously against his light and privileges, whenever he is found vainly puffed up by any selfish desires. And we who may be placed in the situation of more private disciples, have innumerable occasions when we have to stand on our guard against this temptation. It is especially so to us, if our aim is pre-eminence, or if we are ignorant of our own weakness, or if we are ignorant of our own knowledge superior in station to others. To be a chief favourite, to seem to be in the confidence of those to be treated

with a portion of respect from others in consequence of such distinction, may be a corrupt and inordinate passion subtlety working in our breast. We may discover it by examining our own feelings, if we are at any time disappointed in our expectation, if instead of being chief, we see another receiving the distinction ; or, if instead of being privy to the concerns and arrangements of those whom we desire to distinguish us, we are evidently put upon the same rank with the rest of their friends and associates. Should this deeply mortify, should it derange our temper, should it generate a growing distance even to those whom at other times we seem to idolize, we may be assured the love of pre-eminence has struck deep in the heart ; and if we are not resolute in seeking the destruction of its life, it will ruinously spread through our whole christian profession, and render every branch of that profession poor, withering, and profitless. There is also great *folly* in yielding to such a propensity ; for it invariably defeats its own object. It is a disposition which constantly betrays itself, for it loves to be ‘ *prating*,’ and in the endeavour to *appear great*, exposes itself in all its real weakness. Observers have more discernment than they receive credit for ; they easily see through designs of this description ; and however courteously they may deport themselves, whilst listening to the detail of imaginary distinction, they smile at, or pity, or condemn the vanity ; and in proportion the character *sinks* in estimation. How much superior is the liberal disinterestedness of vigorous faith and unfeigned humility. Persons who *pretend to nothing* usually receive the abundant tribute of every honest heart ; such dispositions being intrinsically valuable, and always proving a blessing to the associates which they move. But above all we should recollect, how utterly opposed ~~to the~~ lowliness of a disciple of

Jesus, such an ambition must ever be ; it savours not of the things that be of God ; but of those that be of men ; and is not in any one particular consistent with the counsels of Jesus, or the examples of our Lord.

Let us receive the instruction which is so forcibly granted to us through this medium ; and if we value our own peace, or usefulness, give diligence to mortify the least approaches to self-importance : this must be done by seeking a sanctified knowledge of our own nothingness and dependence. We must labour after a really disinterested desire for the extension of Christ's kingdom, losing sight of self, in the great concern of the cross and the salvation of souls. We must watch against envy, lest it should pervert our judgment, and prejudice our minds. And wherever we see the manifest blessing of God resting upon a minister, a missionary, a believer, a worker, we must learn to be afraid of speaking against him whom the Lord has blessed. Such evil deeds the Lord will remember with awful jealousy, and will arise to expose and punish such sin. But none of these considerations will affect us unless we are in fellowship with God, and see him in the Lord Jesus. To this duty and privilege therefore we must above all things attend, striving to live in the contemplation of our God and Saviour, and to derive from him the omnipotent grace which sanctifies the whole man, making *self* a sacrificed idol.

PRAYER.

O Almighty and merciful God, behold us, we humbly beseech Thee with Thy accustomed compassion, and grant us grace to receive from us, unworthy as we are, an offering of faith and

love. We bow down at Thy feet, O Lord, in prostration of spirit, and cast ourselves before Thee in unutterable necessities. Our wretched nature, our outward temptations, our many trials, are beyond our calculation; and the weight is too heavy for us to bear. We are utterly destitute excepting only as we fall upon Thee in Thy covenant mercies to man. Lord God eternal, let us find Thee in this relation; let us experience Thy great power and willingness to save us; and O give us the possession with such a sense of our debt and dependence, as shall keep us by Thy presence with our souls in constant humility. We beg of Thee to deliver us from every degree of the love of pre-eminence, shewing us how widely different it is from a holy desire of being eminent in the life of the cross, and making us to discriminate between what is evil and good; and open our hearts to receive into them the whole kingdom and interests of redemption, so that we may unfeignedly rejoice when the knowledge of our Lord is spread abroad, although it may be by instruments who eclipse us in their calling. Never let jealousies of any kind disturb thy little flock; O let not the evils of our own selfish dispositions be allowed to darken our own profession, or to injure another; but may we love to see our associates enjoying with ourselves the privileges of our family, and the confidence and affection of those who are appointed to feed our souls. Effect these blessings in us, gracious Lord, by the manifestation of Thyself in our souls. O may we see Thee, having our eyes anointed by the Holy Ghost: O may we love Thee, having all our affections absorbed in Thy favour and love, and under these blessed internal privileges, may the corruptions of our nature grow and our old man be daily crucified. Now that all real peace or enjoyment flows from the simplicity

with which Jesus is our all in all. O give us this state of heart and mind, that we may look for our all in Him, and covet his approving presence as the dearest portion, satisfying every desire. Amen.

THE END.

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